



BIOHYDROGEN PRODUCTION BY DARK  
FERMENTATION OF ACID HYDROLYZED SAGO  
WASTEWATER USING *Enterobacter aerogenes*

BY

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A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirement for the  
degree of Master of Science (Biotechnology Engineering)

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APRIL 2018

## ABSTRACT

As the global fuel hike is inevitable, it is essential to find other options which can substitute fossil fuel. Hydrogen appears as the promising energy alternative which not only meets the demand of energy but also results in the clean environment. However, the current production of hydrogen is releasing much energy and pollution. Therefore, biological approach to produce hydrogen by using microorganism and waste becomes prominent. In the development of biohydrogen research, there is still limited number of records on utilizing sago wastewater as a source of energy. Thus, the main aim of this study is to produce biohydrogen from sago wastewater using *Enterobacter aerogenes* (*E. aerogenes*). In this lab scale study, several sequential methods were used in evaluating the optimization process which was included in the research objectives. Firstly, 10 physico-chemical factors (sago wastewater concentration, temperature, pH, inoculum size, malt extract, yeast extract, iron, magnesium, copper, and nitrogen sparging) affecting biohydrogen production was selected in the Plackett-Burman design. Secondly, the factors were optimized using OFAT method followed by FCCCD under RSM. Thirdly, the kinetics parameters of *E. aerogenes* cell growth, substrate uptake, and biohydrogen production were determined. It was found that early screening using Plackett-Burman design, yeast extract (positive effect), temperature (negative effect) and inoculum size (negative effect) had the most profound effect to the biohydrogen production. The three factors were then subjected to OFAT to find the possible optimum range. It was discovered from OFAT that the inoculum size was already at the optimum condition at 5%. Meanwhile, the possible optimum range for yeast extract concentration and temperature were nearly at 3 g/L and 30°C, respectively, which were then applied as the middle points in the RSM. A total of 11 runs were generated in RSM. The highest hydrogen production was obtained from Run 7 (hydrogen concentration and yield were 629.80  $\mu\text{mol/L}$  and 12.13 mmol H<sub>2</sub>/mol glucose, respectively). The statistical analysis of ANOVA revealed that the linear and quadratic term of yeast extract as well as the quadratic term of temperature were indeed significant to the biohydrogen production. After the whole optimization processes, the maximum hydrogen concentration and yield were recorded to be 630.67  $\mu\text{mol/L}$  and 7.42 mmol H<sub>2</sub>/mol glucose, respectively, which were obtained under the optimum condition (inoculum size 5%, yeast extract concentration 4.8 g/L, and temperature 31°C). The kinetic study was then conducted under the optimum condition using 1 L of Schott bottle. It was found that the exponential phase of *E. aerogenes* along with biohydrogen production occurred between the 9<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> hour of fermentation period. It was then concluded that biohydrogen produced by *E. aerogenes* is a growth-associated product. Several kinetic parameters that were successfully derived from Monod model were  $Y_{xs}$  (0.87 g/g),  $Y_{ps}$  (0.003 mol/mol),  $Y_{px}$  (0.029 g/g),  $\mu$  (0.12 h<sup>-1</sup>),  $t_d$  (6 h) and  $q_p$  (0.0035 hour<sup>-1</sup>). Moreover, a cumulative hydrogen production curve fitted by the modified Gompertz equation suggested that  $H_{max}$ ,  $R_{max}$ , and  $\lambda$  from this study were 15.10 mL, 2.18 mL/h, and 9.84 h, respectively. Although biohydrogen was successfully produced from sago wastewater, the improvement of the yield for further investigation is still needed due to the limitations of this study, especially on improvement of the strain, pre-treatment method of the waste, effect of the by-products, and scale up process.

## ملخص البحث

بما أن ارتفاع الوقود العالمي أمر لا مفر منه فإنّ من الضروري إيجاد خياراتٍ أخرى يمكن أن تحل محل الوقود الأحفوري. يبدو الهيدروجين كبديل للطاقة الواعدة والذي لا يلبى الطلب على الطاقة فحسب ولكن أيضاً يؤدي إلى بيئة نظيفة. ومع ذلك، فإن الإنتاج الحالي من الهيدروجين ينتج الكثير من الطاقة والتلوث. لذلك، فإنّ النهج البيولوجي لإنتاج الهيدروجين باستخدام الكائنات الحية الدقيقة والنفايات أصبح بارزاً. لا يزال هناك عدد محدود من البحوث في تطوير الهيدروجين الحيوي باستخدام مياه الصرف الصحي *sago* كمصدر للطاقة. وهكذا، فإن الهدف الرئيسي من هذه الدراسة هو إنتاج الهيدروجين الحيوي من مياه الصرف الصحي *sago* باستخدام بكتيريا *Enterobacter aerogenes*. في هذه الدراسة، تم استخدام عدة طرق متتابعة في تقييم عملية التحسين التي تم تضمينها في أهداف البحث. أولاً، تم اختيار عشرة عوامل فيزيائية - كيميائية (تركيز مياه الصرف الصحي، درجة الحرارة، درجة الحموضة، حجم اللقاح، مستخلص الشعير، مستخلص الخميرة، والحديد، والمغنيسيوم، والنحاس، والنيروجين) والتي تؤثر على إنتاج الهيدروجين الحيوي في تصميم بلاكيت - بورمان Plackett-Burman. ثانياً، تم تحسين العوامل باستخدام طريقة عامل في وقت واحد OFAT تليها FCCCD تحت RSM. ثالثاً، تم دراسة حركية نمو خلايا *E. aerogenes*، امتصاص الركيزة، وإنتاج الهيدروجين الحيوي. وقد وُجد عند الفحص المبكر باستخدام تصميم بلاكيت-بورمان أنّ مستخلص الخميرة (تأثير إيجابي) ودرجة الحرارة (تأثير سلبي) وحجم اللقاح (تأثير سلبي) كان لها الأثر الأكثر عمقاً من حيث إنتاج الهيدروجين الحيوي. تمّ إخضاع العوامل الثلاثة إلى OFAT لإيجاد المدى الأمثل المحتمل. ومن ذلك وُجد أنّ حجم اللقاح كان بالفعل في الحالة المثلى عند 5%. وفي الوقت نفسه، كان المدى الأمثل الممكن لتركيز مستخلص الخميرة ودرجة الحرارة تقريباً عند 3 جرام / لتر و 30 درجة مئوية، على التوالي، والتي تم تطبيقها كنقاط مركزية في RSM. تمّ توليد ما مجموعه إحدى عشرة تجربة من تصميم منهجية سطح الاستجابة. وقد تم الحصول على أعلى إنتاج للهيدروجين من التجربة رقم 7 (تركيز الهيدروجين وعائده 629.80 ميكرومول/لتر و 12.13 ملليمول هيدروجين / مول من الجلوكوز، على التوالي). كشف التحليل الإحصائي ANOVA أن المعادلة الخطية والتربيعية لمستخلص الخميرة وكذلك المعادلة التربيعية لدرجة الحرارة كان لهما في الواقع أكبر الأثر لإنتاج الهيدروجين الحيوي. بعد جميع عمليات التحسين، تم تسجيل تركيز الهيدروجين الأقصى و عائده عند قيمة 630.67 ميكرومول / لتر و 7.42 ملليمول هيدروجين / مول من الجلوكوز، على التوالي، والتي تم الحصول عليها في ظلّ الظروف المثلى (حجم اللقاح 5%، تركيز مستخلص الخميرة 4.8 جرام/لتر، ودرجة الحرارة 31 درجة مئوية). تمّ أجريت الدراسة الحركية عند الظروف المثلى باستخدام لتر واحد من زجاجة سكوت. ووُجد أنّ المرحلة الأسية لبكتيريا *E. aerogenes* جنباً إلى جنب مع إنتاج الهيدروجين الحيوي كانت واقعةً بين 9 و 30 ساعة من فترة التخمر. ثمّ أُستنتج أنّ الهيدروجين الحيوي الناتج بواسطة *E. aerogenes* هو منتج مرتبط بالنمو. وكذلك تم بنجاح اشتقاق عدة معلمات حركية من نموذج مونود وهي عائده الخلايا/الركيزة 0.87 جرام/جرام، عائده الإنتاج/الركيزة 0.003 مول/مول، عائده الإنتاج/الخلايا 0.029 جرام/جرام، معدل النمو 0.12 لكل ساعة، وقت التضاعف 6 ساعات، ومعدل تكوّن الهيدروجين 0.0035 لكل ساعة. وعلاوة على ذلك، فإن منحنى إنتاج الهيدروجين التراكمي تلاءم مع معادلة غوميرتر المعدلة مايشير إلى أنّ  $R_{max}$  و  $H_{max}$  و  $\lambda$  من هذه الدراسة كانت 15.10 مللتر، 2.18 مللتر / ساعة، 9.84 ساعة، وعلى الرغم من أنّه تم إنتاج الهيدروجين الحيوي بنجاح من مياه الصرف الصحي، إلا أنّ تحسين العائد ومزيداً من التحقيق لا يزال مطلوباً بسبب محدودية هذه الدراسة، وخاصة من حيث دراسة خصائص مياه الصرف الصحي *sago*، وتحسين السلالة البكتيرية، وطريقة معالجة النفايات، وتأثير المنتجات الثانوية، وتوسيع نطاق العملية.

## APPROVAL PAGE

I certify that I have supervised and read this study and that in my opinion, it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Science (Biotechnology Engineering).

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## DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted as a whole for any other degrees at IIUM or other institutions.

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*To you, a knowledge seeker.*

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

All praises be to Allah SWT, Lord of Universe, for His infinite bounties. Peace be upon the last messenger, Prophet Muhammad SAW, his family, his companions, and the people who follow his path.

Firstly, I would like to thank my supervisor Dr Noor Illi Mohamad Puad who has guided me and helped me upon completing this study and who always be there whenever I need her. My gratitude also goes to my co-supervisor, Dr Azlin Suhaida Azmi for her positive ideas, contributions, critics and suggestions. All appreciation and gratitude credits to both of them, from the beginning of this project until it comes to an end.

I would also like to thank the Department of Biotechnology Engineering, Kuliyyah of Engineering for granting the usage of the facilities, especially in Bioprocess Engineering Laboratory, OSC Laboratory, and Plant Biotechnology Laboratory.

I also appreciate all Plant Biotechnology Laboratory members, especially Brother Mohamad Izhar Abdul Malek and Sister Nur Alia M. Fathil, who have helped me when I did experiments in the laboratory. To my whole colleagues, technicians, and academic staff members I would like to thank as well for their direct and indirect helps.

I am also grateful to LPDP (Lembaga Pengelola Dana Pendidikan), an Indonesia endowment fund which gave me full financial support especially for this project and my whole academic journey from the beginning until the end of my master life.

Finally, special thanks belong to my beloved husband Muhammad Rizky Prima Sakti, my son Algazel Haydar Rizky, my parents, and the whole family members for their endless love, du'a and blessing, moral support, and courage to always think positively in completing this project.

May Allah reward all of your efforts with His blessing and forgiveness and carve you all path of heaven. *In Sha Allah, Aameen.*



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract .....	ii
Abstract in Arabic .....	iii
Approval Page.....	iv
Declaration Page .....	v
Copyright Page.....	vi
Acknowledgements .....	viii
Table of Contents .....	ix
List of Tables .....	xii
List of Figures .....	xiv
List of Symbol and Abbreviation.....	xvi
<b>CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 Background of Study .....	1
1.2 Problem Statement and Its Significance .....	3
1.3 Research Objectives.....	5
1.4 Research Scope .....	5
1.5 Research Methodology .....	6
1.6 Thesis Organization .....	7
<b>CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW.....</b>	<b>9</b>
2.1 Introduction.....	9
2.2 Biohydrogen .....	9
2.3 Biohydrogen Production Process by Bacteria .....	10
2.3.1 Photofermentation .....	11
2.3.2 Dark Fermentation .....	11
2.3.2.1 Butyric Acid Fermentation .....	13
2.3.2.2 Mixed Acid Fermentation.....	14
2.3.3 Hybrid Fermentation .....	15
2.4 Biohydrogen Producing Bacteria by Dark Fermentation .....	16
2.4.1 Obligate Anaerobe .....	20
2.4.2 Facultative Anaerobe .....	21
2.4.3 Aerobe .....	22
2.5 <i>Enterobacter aerogenes</i> as Biohydrogen Producing Bacteria.....	22
2.6 Raw Material for Biohydrogen Production .....	23
2.6.1 Sago Waste as Biohydrogen Feedstock .....	26
2.6.2 Sago Wastewater Pre-Treatment.....	28
2.7 Factors affecting dark fermentation process.....	31
2.7.1 Effect of Inoculum Size .....	31
2.7.2 Effect of pH.....	32
2.7.3 Effect of Temperature .....	33
2.7.4 Effect of Nitrogen Sparge .....	34
2.7.5 Effect of Metal Ion .....	35
2.7.5.1 Iron.....	35
2.7.5.2 Magnesium .....	36
2.7.5.3 Copper .....	36

2.8 Kinetic Study .....	40
2.9 Optimization Studies .....	42
2.9.1 Univariate Optimization.....	43
2.9.2 Multivariate Optimization.....	43
2.10 Summary.....	44
<b>CHAPTER 3: MATERIALS AND METHODS .....</b>	<b>46</b>
3.1 Introduction.....	46
3.2 Experimental Materials.....	50
3.2.1 Collection of Sago Wastewater.....	50
3.2.2 Microorganism .....	50
3.2.3 Chemicals and Reagents .....	51
3.2.4 Consumable Items.....	51
3.2.5 Equipment .....	51
3.3 General Procedures and Analytical Methods .....	52
3.3.1 Inoculum Preparation and Subculture.....	52
3.3.2 Preparation of Fermentation Media .....	53
3.3.3 Hydrogen Sampling .....	53
3.3.4 Determination of Glucose Content .....	54
3.3.5 Estimation of Cell Concentration.....	55
3.4 Preparation of Sago Wastewater.....	56
3.4.1 Characterization of Sago Wastewater .....	56
3.4.2 Hydrolysis of Sago Wastewater.....	57
3.5 Objective I: Selection of Factors Affecting Biohydrogen Production....	57
3.6 Objective II: Optimization of Process Condition of Biohydrogen Production.....	59
3.6.1 OFAT .....	59
3.6.2 RSM .....	60
3.7 Objective III: Kinetic Study of Cell Growth, Substrate Uptake and Biohydrogen Production.....	62
3.8 Summary.....	64
<b>CHAPTER 4: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION .....</b>	<b>65</b>
4.1 Introduction.....	65
4.2 Characteristics of Sago Wastewater .....	65
4.3 Effect of Acid hydrolysis on Glucose Content of Sago Wastewater.....	66
4.4 Objective I: Selection of Factors Affecting Biohydrogen Production....	68
4.5 Objective II: Optimization of Process Condition of Biohydrogen Production.....	74
4.5.1 OFAT .....	74
4.5.2 RSM .....	77
4.5.3 Effect of Yeast Extract on Biohydrogen Production .....	83
4.5.4 Effect of Temperature on Biohydrogen Production.....	84
4.5.5 Effect of Inoculum Size on Biohydrogen Production.....	84
4.6 Objective III: Kinetic Study of Cell Growth, Substrate Uptake and Biohydrogen Production.....	85
4.6.1 Effect of Fermentation Time to Cell Growth, Substrate Uptake and Hydrogen Concentration.....	86
4.6.2 Kinetics Parameters of Biohydrogen Production.....	91

4.6.2.1 Yield of Biohydrogen Production and Bacterial Growth	91
4.6.2.2 Specific Rate of Bacterial Growth.....	93
4.6.2.3 Specific Rate of Product Formation .....	94
4.6.3 Cumulative Hydrogen Production .....	95
4.7 Summary.....	98
<b>CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS .....</b>	<b>99</b>
5.1 Conclusion .....	99
5.2 Recommendations.....	101
<b>REFERENCES.....</b>	<b>103</b>
APPENDIX A .....	115
APPENDIX B .....	116
APPENDIX C .....	117
APPENDIX D .....	118
APPENDIX E .....	123
APPENDIX F.....	125

## LIST OF TABLES

	<u>Page No.</u>
Table 2.1 Variety of dark fermentative bacteria in single culture, co-culture and mixed culture for biohydrogen production	19
Table 2.2 Biohydrogen yield produced from different substrates	25
Table 2.3 Characteristics of sago wastewater (Yunus et al., 2014)	28
Table 2.4 Pre-treatment method used to hydrolyze sago waste	29
Table 2.5 Literature survey on the effects of fermentation process parameters (inoculum size, pH, temperature, nitrogen sparge, and metals concentration) of biohydrogen production using dark fermentative bacteria	38
Table 3.1 Composition of the LB broth media	52
Table 3.2 The range of 10 physico-chemicals factors for Plackett-Burman experiments	58
Table 3.3 Plackett-Burman experimental design for the evaluation of 10 physico-chemical factors for biohydrogen production	58
Table 3.4 Experimental design for approximate media optimization by OFAT method	60
Table 3.5 The range of selected parameters for RSM experiments	61
Table 3.6 Experimental design using FCCCD showing coded and actual value	61
Table 4.1 Characteristics of sago wastewater used in this study and its comparison	66
Table 4.2 Comparison of raw and hydrolyzed sago wastewater	67
Table 4.3 ANOVA of Plackett-Burman design for selected factorial variables	70
Table 4.4 ANOVA for response surface quadratic model for biohydrogen production by <i>E. aerogenes</i>	80
Table 4.5 Critical value for model validation of optimum factors using RSM	82
Table 4.6 Concentration of substrate, product and by-products during kinetic study	89

Table 4.7 Cumulative hydrogen production obtained from a total of 36 hours fermentation time	95
Table 4.8 Comparative review of kinetic parameters as obtained by modified Gompertz equation	97

## LIST OF FIGURES

	<u>Page No.</u>
Figure 1.1 Overview of the research methodology	7
Figure 2.1 The scheme of hydrogen synthetic pathway in butyric acid fermentation (Sikora et al., 2013)	14
Figure 2.2 The scheme of hydrogen synthesis pathway in mixed acid fermentation (Sikora et al., 2013)	15
Figure 2.3 Schematic flow diagram for sago processing (Adeni et al., 2010)	27
Figure 3.1 An overview of the experimental workflow	47
Figure 3.2 Flowchart for the preparation process of sago wastewater	48
Figure 3.3 Flowchart for screening process in Plackett Burman design	48
Figure 3.4 Flowchart for the optimization of condition process in OFAT and RSM	49
Figure 3.5 Flowchart for the determination process of kinetic parameters	50
Figure 3.6 Experimental set up of hydrogen sampling: Hydrogen filling the syringe due to hydrogen build up pressure from the bottle, A; Hydrogen analysis in H <sub>2</sub> analyzer, B	54
Figure 3.7 Determination of CFU by colony counting method using serial dilution	56
Figure 3.8 Experimental set-up of fermentation process during kinetics study using water displacement method	62
Figure 4.1 Different concentrations of hydrogen produced from the total 12 runs of Plackett-Burman Design	68
Figure 4.2 Main effects of the physico-chemical factors for biohydrogen production based on the Plackett-Burman result	69
Figure 4.3 Effect of yeast extract concentration on hydrogen concentration	75
Figure 4.4 Effect of temperature on hydrogen concentration	76
Figure. 4.5 Effect of inoculum size on hydrogen concentration	77
Figure 4.6 Hydrogen concentration as a response during optimization using RSM	78

Figure 4.7 3D and 2D response surface contour plot show the effect of yeast extract concentration and temperature on biohydrogen production	81
Figure 4.8 The profile of <i>E. aerogenes</i> in terms of biomass, substrate and product in the function of time	86
Figure 4.9 pH measurement of the media during fermentation	90
Figure 4.10 Acids produced as the by-product during biohydrogen production by <i>E. aerogenes</i>	90
Figure 4.11 Yield of biomass from substrate ( $Y_{xs}$ ), A; yield of product from substrate ( $Y_{ps}$ ), B; and yield of product from biomass ( $Y_{px}$ ), C	92
Figure 4.12 Logarithmic <i>E. aerogenes</i> growth during biohydrogen production	93
Figure 4.13 Modified Gompertz equation fitted for biohydrogen production by <i>E. aerogenes</i>	96

## LIST OF SYMBOL AND ABBREVIATION

$(\text{NH}_4)_2\text{SO}_4$	ammonium sulfate
$\mu$	specific growth rate
$\mu_{max}$	maximum specific growth rate
$\mu\text{mol/L}$	micromole/litre
Ca	calcium
$\text{CaCl}_2 \cdot 2\text{H}_2\text{O}$	calcium chloride dihydrate
$\text{CaCO}_3$	calcium carbonate
Co	cobalt
$\text{CO}_2$	carbon dioxide
Cr	chromium
Cu	copper
$\text{CuCl}_2$	copper(II) chloride
$\text{CuSO}_4$	copper sulphate
$e$	exponential constant 2.718
Fe	iron
$\text{FeSO}_4$	ferrous sulfate
g/L	gram per litre
$H(t)$	cumulative volume of hydrogen production
$\text{H}_2$	hydrogen
$\text{H}_2\text{SO}_4$	sulphuric acid
HCl	hydrochloric acid
$H_{max}$	hydrogen gas product potential
K	potassium
$\text{K}_2\text{HPO}_4$	dipotassium phosphate
$\text{KH}_2\text{PO}_4$	monopotassium phosphate
$K_s$	saturation constant
M	molar
Mg	magnesium
$\text{MgSO}_4$	magnesium sulfate
mL	mililitre
Mn	manganese
Mo	molybdenum
$m_p$	specific rate of product formation due to maintenance
Na	sodium
$\text{Na}_2\text{MoO}_4 \cdot 2\text{H}_2\text{O}$	sodium molybdate dihydrate
$\text{Na}_2\text{SeO}_3$	sodium selenite
$\text{NaNO}_3$	sodium nitrate
NaOH	sodium hydroxide
Ni	nickel
$\text{NiCl}_2$	nickel(II) chloride
$^\circ\text{C}$	degree Celcius
P	phosphate
Pb	lead
$q_p$	specific rate of product formation
$q_s$	specific rate of substrate uptake



$R_m$	maximum production rate
rpm	rotation per minute
S	concentration of the limiting substrate
Se	selenium
$t$	time
v/v	volume per volume
$X$	biomass concentration
$X_0$	initial biomass concentration
$Y_{px}$	yield of product from biomass
$Y_{xs}$	yield of biomass from substrate
$Y_{ps}$	yield of product from substrate
Zn	zinc
$\gamma\text{-Fe}_2\text{O}_3$	gamma-iron(III) oxide
$\lambda$	lag time
ANOVA	analysis of variance
ATP	adenosine triphosphate
CDW	cell dry weight
CFO	colony forming unit
FCCCD	face centred central composite design
FHL	formate hydrogen lysate
GHG	greenhouse gas
HPLC	high performance liquid chromatography
LB	luria bertani
MYG	malt yeast glucose
NADH	nicotinamide adenine dinucleotide
OFAT	one factor at a time
PFL	pyruvate formate lysate
PFOR	pyruvate ferredoxin oxidoreductase
PSI	photosystem I
PSII	photosystem II
RSM	response surface method
SCB	sugarcane bagasse
SMR	steam methane reforming
TDS	total dissolve solid
TSS	total suspended solid
VFA	volatile fatty acid
VSS	volatile suspended solid

# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 BACKGROUND OF STUDY

Nowadays, the need of energy has become a global issue that is challenging to the humanity due to its high demand, and fossil fuel is still the main source of energy. It was predicted that by 2035 human population will be increased by 1.6 billion (*BP Statistical Review of World Energy*, 2014). Yet, the current oil reservoir would not be sufficient to fulfil this overwhelming population.

The persistent use of fossil fuel and petroleum leads to the environmental problems. Combustion of fossil fuel releases carbon dioxide in the atmosphere that causes greenhouse gas (GHG) effects. GHG emission will increase the surface temperature of the earth which results in global warming and climate change of the earth. Not only carbon dioxide, other pollutants like sulfur oxide, nitrogen oxide, ash, droplets of tars, soot and other organic compounds, are also emitted into the atmosphere as a result of their combustion (Das & Veziroglu, 2001).

Hydrogen has gained a global attention as an energy carrier for an alternative clean fuel in the future by which it is able to produce water as by-product (Momirlan & Veziroglu, 2005). Moreover, as compared to other fuels, hydrogen carries the highest energy per unit mass and lowest CO<sub>2</sub> content (Das, Khanna, & Dasgupta, 2014). Kapdan and Kargi (2006) reported that hydrogen has a 2.75 times greater high energy yield than hydrocarbon fuels. However, the major problem in utilization of hydrogen gas as a fuel is that, it does not available in nature as a single product. Therefore, it needs expensive production methods.

The current hydrogen gas production is not eco-friendly as it is being generated from fossil fuels through thermo-chemical processes, such as hydrocarbon reforming, coal gasification and partial oxidation of heavier hydrocarbons (Show, Lee, & Chang, 2011). Thus, to overcome this, researchers have found other alternatives on how to harvest hydrogen by utilizing the least energy. Production of hydrogen by biological means has attracted attention of researchers to investigate its potential for inexhaustible, low-cost and renewable source of clean energy.

On the other hand, the expansion of industries also contributes to the environmental problems. Industries discharge chemicals and organic waste that needs to be treated in such a way that it will not harm ecosystem when it is released to the environment. The major challenge is how to utilize sludge or waste to become useful and viable product. Accordingly, the main objective of these facts is to reduce the health or environmental side effects to the lowest level as well as to maintain the sustainability of raw material.

From this notion, many researchers nowadays focus on utilization of organic wastes as the substrate. However not all wastes can be used to produce biohydrogen. Cost, availability, carbohydrate content and biodegradability are the major criteria to be considered in choosing the appropriate waste (Kapdan & Kargi, 2006). Some of the wastes that are known as biohydrogen substrate include fruit and vegetable waste (Saidi et al., 2018), waste wheat (Kirli & Karapinar, 2018), waste paper (Eker & Sarp, 2017), waste peach pulp (Argun & Dao, 2017), whey waste (Patel, Vaisnav, Mathur, Gupta, & Tuli, 2016) and dairy wastewater (Gadhe, Sonawane, & Varma, 2015).

Sago palm is widely planted in Malaysia. The plantation has been well established and become one of the sources of national income by export. About 12% of the total Sarawak area is covered by sago palm (Karim, Tie, Manan, & Zaidul, 2008).

To produce 1 ton of starch in industry, 20-60 m<sup>3</sup> of wastewater is discharged. The wastewater composed of carbohydrates, nitrogen and phosphorus at a ratio of 24:0.14:1 (Adeni, Aziz, Bujang, & Hassan, 2010). Based on this composition, it showed that sago wastewater contains a high amount of carbohydrates and it is a potential substrate to produce biohydrogen. Therefore, this research investigated biohydrogen production from sago wastewater as the substrate using microbial organism.

## **1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE**

The continuous demand of energy supply leads to the depletion of fossil fuel since energy in the world is still focused to this kind of energy. Yet, fossil fuel is a non-renewable energy source. Biohydrogen from waste may become an alternative energy in the future. Moreover, the environmental problem that usually caused by the waste can be addressed simultaneously. Therefore, it is considered as the clean energy.

Initially, the research for biohydrogen production utilized substrate from the laboratory grade of chemicals such as glucose, glycerol, acetate and butyrate which require a high production cost. Even though the yield is high, the use of synthetic chemical is not economical for the continuous production of biohydrogen. On the other hand, waste is considered as a cheap option for the sustainability of raw material (Khanna & Das, 2013). In Malaysia, sago starch is one of the major food industries. Sago waste becomes very potential as a substrate for biohydrogen production because it is available abundantly in Malaysia and it contains soluble carbohydrate. Unfortunately, there is a limited study addressing utilization of sago wastewater as a substrate for biohydrogen production. So far, the scope of investigation is also limited to studying the effect of pH, temperature and inoculum size (Puad, Sulaiman, Azmi, Shamsudin, & Mel, 2015). Other investigation studied the feasibility of biohydrogen

production from sago wastewater by utilizing a mixed microbial consortia (Yunus et al., 2014). The experiment results confirmed the potential use of sago mill effluent with a significant improvement of hydrogen yield when the pH was optimized. Later investigation studied the effect of enzymatic hydrolysis as the pre-treatment method for biohydrogen production from sago mill effluent (Yunus, Jahim, Anuar, Abdullah, & Kofli, 2014). Therefore, by considering above justification that the scope of investigation from previous studies are still having a gap to be fulfilled, this study is aiming to improve biohydrogen production from sago wastewater by optimizing some process parameters that was investigated throughout the experiments in the lab scale.

Up to date, the research of biohydrogen production from sago waste used mixed culture instead of single culture. However, the drawback of mixed culture is that, there may be a possibility that the bacteria will inhibit each other due to by-product which may be toxic for other bacteria. Nevertheless, the researches of biohydrogen production from sago waste are still limited, especially using *E. aerogenes*. Therefore, in this study biohydrogen production from sago wastewater using the single culture of *E. aerogenes* was carried out. However, since it is single culture, the system should be in sterile condition. It was hypothesized that sago wastewater can provide the adequate glucose content required as a substrate for *E. aerogenes* in producing biohydrogen. Optimization of several physico-chemical factors such as sago wastewater concentration, pH, inoculum size, temperature, nitrogen sparge, and the addition some metals to the media was conducted to produce high yield of biohydrogen using sago wastewater as the substrate by *E. aerogenes*.

### **1.3 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

The main objective of this study is to evaluate the ability of sago wastewater as the main substrate for biohydrogen production by *E. aerogenes*. Meanwhile the specific objectives are as follow:

1. To select the physico-chemical factors that affect biohydrogen production from sago wastewater by *E. aerogenes*.
2. To optimize the physico-chemical process conditions of biohydrogen production by *E. aerogenes* in serum bottles using Face Centred Central Composite Design (FCCCD).
3. To determine the kinetic parameters of *E. aerogenes* cell growth, substrate uptake, and biohydrogen production.

### **1.4 RESEARCH SCOPE**

Biohydrogen attracts much attentions from the environment and energy sectors due to its viability. The idea of using bacteria as an agent and waste as a substrate is not only to produce biohydrogen, but is also to degrade waste in the environment. Moreover, it also can suppress the total cost of production as compared to hydrogen production by the conventional methods.

This research was intended to utilize sago wastewater for biohydrogen production as well as to perform bioremediation of wastewater. Microbial fermentation technique was employed using single culture of *E. aerogenes* instead of co-culture or mixed culture in dark fermentation. Acid hydrolysis was used as the pre-treatment method to break down starch in sago wastewater into the fermentable sugars. Ten physico-chemical factors (sago wastewater concentration, pH, inoculum size, temperature, yeast extract, malt extract, iron, magnesium and copper concentration, and

nitrogen sparge) were subjected to the screening process using Plackett-Burman design. The 3 most significant factors were optimized for a maximum biohydrogen production using One-Factor-At-a-Time (OFAT) method followed by Face Centred Central Composite Design (FCCCD) under Response Surface Method (RSM). The screening and optimization process of factors were investigated in serum bottles with the aid of statistical software namely Design Expert (V.9.0.6). Kinetic study was carried out in 1 L Schott bottle for *E. aerogenes* in term of cell growth, cumulative biohydrogen production, and substrate consumption. The data output obtained were hydrogen concentration and yield from glucose. The biohydrogen produced was measured using a hydrogen gas analyzer.

## **1.5 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The attainment of the set of objectives should be according to a well-planned methodology (Figure 1.1), which is outlined as follow:

1. Characterization of sago wastewater and pre-treatment process using acid hydrolysis to obtain more fermentable sugars.
2. Early screening of 10 physico-chemical factors affecting biohydrogen production by *E. aerogenes* including sago wastewater concentration, pH, temperature, inoculum size, malt extract, yeast extract and some metals concentration and sparging of nitrogen which were conducted using statistical analysis experimental design; Plackett-Burman design.
3. Reduction of the 10 physico-chemical factors into three most significant variables.
4. Examination of the possible optimum range, which used OFAT approach.
5. Genuine optimization of the significant variables using FCCCD under RSM.

6. Evaluation of the kinetics study which covered several parameters including substrate uptake ( $Y_{ps}$ ), the yield of biomass formation based on substrate uptake ( $Y_{xs}$ ), the yield of product formation based on biomass formation ( $Y_{px}$ ), specific growth of bacteria ( $\mu$ ), doubling time ( $t_d$ ) and specific rate of product formation ( $q_p$ ) which used Monod model.
7. Determination of cumulative hydrogen production using Gompertz equation.

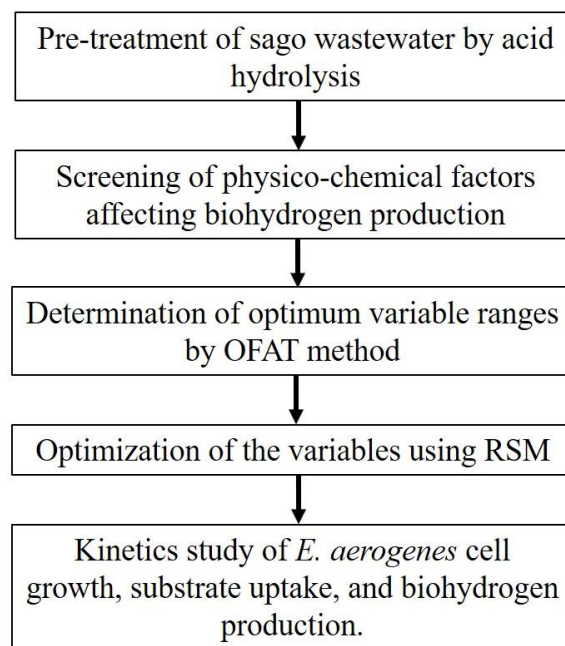


Figure 1.1 Overview of the research methodology

## 1.6 THESIS ORGANIZATION

This thesis is organized into five chapters; Introduction, Literature review, Methodology, Results and discussion and finally, Conclusion. Chapter 1 describes a brief background of the study, problem statement and its significant, research scope, research methodology and thesis organization. Chapter 2 reviews the available literature related to the subject of study and provide knowledge and information based on the limitation set in the scope of study. Chapter 3 discusses the detailed methodology,