

Research Article

Protective Effects of Dietary *Etlingera elatior* (Jack) Bud Flower Powder against *Edwardsiella tarda* Infection in African Catfish, *Clarias gariepinus*

Seong Wei Lee ¹, Vui Kien Liew,² Zulhisyam Abdul Kari ¹, Muhammad Anamul Kabir,³ M. N. Azra ⁴, Martina Irwan Khoo ⁵, and Wendy Wee ⁶

¹Faculty of Agro-Based Industry, Universiti Malaysia Kelantan, Jeli Campus, Jeli 17600, Kelantan, Malaysia

²Department of Johor State Fisheries Complex, Pendas Laut Road, Gelang Patah 81550, Johor, Malaysia

³Department of Aquaculture, Faculty of Fisheries, Sylhet Agricultural University, Sylhet 3100, Bangladesh

⁴Institute of Climate Adaptation and Marine Biotechnology (ICAMB), Universiti Malaysia Terengganu (UMT), Kuala Nerus 21030, Terengganu, Malaysia

⁵Department of Chemical Pathology, School of Medical Sciences, Universiti Sains Malaysia, Health Campus, Kubang Kerian 16150, Malaysia

⁶Center of Fundamental and Continuing Education, Universiti Malaysia Terengganu, Kuala Nerus 21030, Terengganu, Malaysia

Correspondence should be addressed to Seong Wei Lee; leeseong@umk.edu.my and Wendy Wee; wendy@umt.edu.my

Received 20 November 2023; Accepted 13 August 2024

Academic Editor: Christyn Bailey

Copyright © 2024 Seong Wei Lee et al. This is an open access article distributed under the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

This study investigates the impacts of dietary *Etlingera elatior* (Jack) bud flower powder (EE) supplementation on the growth and health status of African catfish, *Clarias gariepinus*. Each treatment group received different formulated diets: basal diet without EE (control), basal diet + 1% EE (EE1), basal diet + 2% EE (EE2), basal diet + 3% EE (EE3), and basal diet + 4% EE (EE4). After an 8-week feeding trial, fish supplemented with dietary EE exhibited significantly improved growth performance, such as weight gain (WG; 1,251.4%–1,604.3%; $p < 0.0001$), specific growth rate (SGR; 2.02%–2.20%; $p < 0.0001$), and final weight (FW; 141.7–178.9 g; $p < 0.0001$) than the control group (WG: 1,192.0%, SGR: 1.98%, and FW: 136.1 g), particularly EE2 and EE3. Furthermore, EE-treated fish recorded significantly lower feed conversion rate (FCR; 1.19–1.53; $p < 0.0001$), viscerosomatic index (VSI; 3.40%–4.50%; $p < 0.0001$), and hepatosomatic index (HSI; 3.13%–4.40%; $p < 0.0001$) than the control (FCR: 1.59, VSI: 5.48%, and HSI: 4.75%), particularly EE2 and EE3. The EE-treated fish also had significantly higher white blood cell (WBC) count (124.6–148.6/ μL ; $p < 0.0400$), red blood cell (RBC) count ($2.43\text{--}4.03 \times 10^3/\mu\text{L}$; $p < 0.0002$), hemoglobin (HGB) concentration (6.27–7.87 g/dL; $p < 0.0160$), and hematocrit (HCT; 26.8%–38.7%; $p < 0.0200$) compared to the control (WBC count: 112.1/ μL , RBC count: $2.17 \times 10^3/\mu\text{L}$, HGB concentration: 5.60 g/dL, and HCT: 23.7%), with the highest being EE2 and EE3. Dietary EE diets enhanced digestive enzyme activities, including amylase ($p < 0.0090$), protease ($p < 0.0040$), and lipase ($p < 0.0060$), significantly ($p < 0.05$) than the control, where EE2 and EE3 demonstrated the highest activities. The EE supplementation also significantly improved the fish's antioxidative responses, particularly catalase (CAT; $p < 0.0100$), glutathione peroxidase (GPx; $p < 0.0300$), and superoxide dismutase (SOD; $p < 0.0100$) in EE2 and EE3. Similarly, the cumulative survival rate of EE2 ($66.7\% \pm 5.77\%$) and EE3 ($66.7\% \pm 5.77\%$) were significantly ($p < 0.0001$) higher than other groups post-*Edwardsiella tarda* challenge. Therefore, this study findings highlighted the potential benefits of EE as a feed additive to boost the production in African catfish farming.

1. Introduction

African catfish, *Clarias gariepinus* culture, is gaining popularity in Malaysia due to the fish's rapid growth, adaptability

in high stocking density, and high tolerance in nonoptimal environments [1]. Furthermore, their delectable flesh and affordable price are attributed to the high market demand, which is estimated to increase rapidly in the near future [1].

Despite that, intensive farming poses a risk of growth and health impairments in this aquaculture species [1], subjecting them to high stress and susceptibility to infectious diseases, such as Edwardsiellosis caused by *Edwardsiella tarda*. *Edwardsiella tarda* is a significant bacterial species in aquaculture that has devastating impacts on fish farmers, which could end their operation in severe cases [2]. This microorganism has a wide range of hosts, including marine, freshwater, terrestrial, and aquatic animals [3]. *Edwardsiella tarda* was reportedly isolated from various healthy, diseased, and moribund aquatic animals, such as African catfish (*C. gariepinus*) [4], Malaysia freshwater giant prawn (*Macrobrachium rosenbergii*) [5], silver catfish (*Pangasius sutchi*) [6], American bullfrog (*Rana catesbeiana*) [7, 8], Asian clam (*Corbicula fluminea*) [9], Asian seabass (*Lates calcarifer*) [10], hybrid snakehead (*Channa maculate* ♀ × *C. argus* ♂) [11], pompano (*Trachinotus blochii*) [6], Siamese crocodile (*Crocodylus siamensis*) [12], Japanese flounder (*Paralichthys olivaceus*) [13], red hybrid tilapia (*Oreochromis* spp.) [14, 15], and grass carp (*Ctenopharyngodon Idella*) [16]. Edwardsiellosis infection in African catfish caused histopathological alterations in the organs including kidney, spleen, muscles, and skin as well as swelling in the organs such as kidney, liver, spleen, intestine, and muscles, subsequently, Edwardsiellosis infection in African catfish end up with high mortality [17]. Consequently, treatment and prevention strategies against *E. tarda* infection in aquaculture species have been developed, such as antibiotics, probiotics, prebiotics, vaccines, and phytobiotics [18].

Antibiotic usage in aquaculture adversely impacts public health and the environment [19]. In addition, vaccination programs have been proven effective for disease control disease in aquaculture, but are costly and labor-intensive [18]. Alternatively, probiotics and prebiotics have recently been widely utilized as feed additive aquatic health management. Studies have revealed the potential of phytobiotics as a feed additive to enhance the growth and health of aquaculture species. For instance, dietary kelp powder stimulated disease resistance of hybrid snakeheads, *C. maculate* ♀ × *C. argus* ♂, against *Aeromonas hydrophila* [20]. Common carp, *Cyprinus carpio*, supplemented with ginger, *Zingiber officinale*, extract also demonstrated enhanced growth performance and health status [21]. Other phytobiotics such as essential oil from sweet orange, *Citrus sinensis*; bitter lemon, *C. limon* [22]; pineapple, *Ananas comosus*; waste [23]; curcumin; *Andrographis paniculata* leaf [24]; and ginger powder [25] also positively influenced the growth and health of Nile tilapia, *Oreochromis niloticus*; grass carp, *C. idella*; and striped catfish, *Pangasianodon hypothalmus*; respectively.

Phytobiotics from the Zingiberaceae family promoted the growth and health of aquatic animals. Dietary ginger rhizome powder and extract, ginger oil, essential oil, and shogaol in this rhizome enhanced the growth performance and health status of striped catfish, *P. hypothalmus* [25]; rainbow trout, *Oncorhynchus mykiss* [26]; *Labeo rohita* [27]; common carp, *C. carpio* [28]; guppy, *Poecilia reticulata* [29]; tilapia, *Oreochromis* spp. [30]; and white leg shrimp, *Litopenaeus vannamei* [31]; respectively. Moreover, dietary ginger and its derivatives

could relieve stress in largemouth bass, *Micropterus salmoides* [32] and stimulate disease resistance against Edwardsiellosis in African catfish, *C. gariepinus* [17]. Nonetheless, the potential of other plants in the Zingiberaceae family remained unexplored.

The torch ginger, *Elingera elatior* (Jack; EE) flower bud, or *bunga kantan* in Malaysia is a common ingredient in Asian cuisine. This plant contains phenolic compounds, flavonoids, anthocyanin, and tannin, contributing to its superior antioxidant and antimicrobial properties [33]. Traditionally, torch ginger leaf is used for odor control, earache treatment, and wound healing [34]. No study has reported EE flower bud application as a feed additive in aqua feed. Therefore, this study is one of the first current to investigate the effects of EE as a feed additive on growth performance, digestive enzyme activity, hematology, antioxidative responses, and disease resistance against *E. tarda* infection in African catfish.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Plant Preparation. The EE flower buds were purchased from a wet market in Jeli, Kelantan, Malaysia. The flower buds were rinsed under running tap water and oven-dried at 50°C until completely dried [34]. The dried flower buds were ground into powder form and stored in a freezer until further use.

2.2. Torch Ginger (EE) Flower Bud Diet Preparation. A starter commercial pellet for African catfish was purchased and ground into powder form. The nutritional profile of the commercial diet is as follows: crude protein = 34%, fat = 4%, and moisture = 11%. The powdered commercial pellet was homogenized with EE at different levels: control (no EE), EE1 (1% EE), EE2 (2% EE), EE3 (3% EE), and EE4 (4% EE), and water was added to form a dough. The dough was passed through a hand meat processor and oven-dried at 40°C until completely dried. Finally, all the prepared feed was broken down into smaller pieces (± 2 mm) and stored in the freezer for further use.

2.3. Experimental Fish. Healthy African catfish fry ($n = 1,000$) was purchased from a commercial farm in Tanah Merah, Kelantan, and acclimatized in a 500 L tank for a week. Subsequently, 450 healthy fries with an average weight of 10.5 g were distributed equally into 15 units of 50 L aquarium. The experiment was carried out in triplicates (30 fry/tank), and the feeding trial was conducted for 8 weeks. The fish were fed once daily *ad libitum* in the morning, and 100% water change was carried out in the afternoon. The water parameters, such as temperature, pH, dissolved oxygen and ammonia, of the aquaria, were monitored weekly using multiparameter (YSI ProQuatro, USA) and ammonia kit (API, Malaysia).

2.4. Determination of Growth Parameters. At the end of the feeding trial, all the fish were weighed to determine their weight gain (WG), specific growth rate (SGR), feed conversion rate (FCR), viscerosomatic index (VSI), and hepatosomatic index (HSI), as described in earlier studies [35, 36].

TABLE 1: Growth performance parameters of experimental fish fed torch ginger, *Etilingera elatior*, flower bud powder diets for 8 weeks.

Parameters	Control	EE1	EE2	EE3	EE4
Initial weight (IW; g)	10.5 ± 0.06	10.5 ± 0.06	10.5 ± 0.00	10.5 ± 0.10	10.4 ± 0.12
Final weight (FW; g)	136.1 ± 4.50 ^a	157.3 ± 1.56 ^b	177.6 ± 4.02 ^c	178.9 ± 7.16 ^c	141.7 ± 4.99 ^a
Weight gain (WG; %)	1,192.0 ± 39.94 ^a	1,402.6 ± 16.31 ^b	1,591.1 ± 38.30 ^c	1,604.3 ± 61.11 ^c	1,251.4 ± 44.36 ^a
Specific growth rate (SGR; %)	1.98 ± 0.024 ^a	2.10 ± 0.008 ^b	2.19 ± 0.018 ^c	2.20 ± 0.028 ^c	2.02 ± 0.025 ^a
Hepatosomatic index (HSI; %)	4.75 ± 0.130 ^a	3.98 ± 0.122 ^b	3.19 ± 0.278 ^c	3.13 ± 0.254 ^c	4.40 ± 0.262 ^{ab}
Visceral somatic (VSI; %)	5.48 ± 0.117 ^a	4.15 ± 0.136 ^b	3.40 ± 0.210 ^a	3.43 ± 0.089 ^a	4.50 ± 0.295 ^b
Feed conversion ratio (FCR)	1.59 ± 0.058 ^a	1.36 ± 0.014 ^b	1.20 ± 0.029 ^c	1.19 ± 0.050 ^c	1.53 ± 0.057 ^a

Note. Data expressed as mean ± standard deviation. EE1, 2, 3, and 4 = 1%, 2%, 3%, and 4% of torch ginger, *Etilingera elatior*, flower bud powder diets. Values in the same row with different letters showed significant difference at $p < 0.05$.

2.5. Hematological Analysis. Experimental fish from each treatment ($n = 3$) were sampled for blood collection at the end of the feeding trial. First, the selected fish were anesthetized using clove oil. The blood was withdrawn, and the samples were kept in heparinized tubes. Finally, the blood samples were subjected to hematological analysis in the laboratory using a hematology analyzer (Mythic 18 Vet, USA) [37]. The hematological parameters were measured in the current study, including white blood cell (WBC) count, lymphocytosis (LYM), monocytes (MON), red blood cell (RBC) count, hemoglobin (HGB) concentration, hematocrit (HCT), mean corpuscular hemoglobin (MCH), and mean corpuscular hemoglobin concentration (MCHC).

2.6. Determination of Digestive Enzyme Activities. The fish from Section 2.5 were dissected, and their intestines were harvested. The samples were homogenized with phosphate-buffered saline (PBS) and centrifuged at 8,000 rpm for 10 min. The supernatants were used for the determination of digestive enzyme activities. The iodine solution and Folin–Ciocalteu phenol reagent were used to analyze amylase and protease activities, respectively [38]. Meanwhile, lipase activity was determined, as described by Borlongan [39].

2.7. Determination of Antioxidative Responses. Liver samples were obtained from the fish in Section 2.5 to analyze their antioxidative responses. The fish livers were homogenized with PBS and centrifuged at 8,000 rpm for 10 min. The supernatants were collected and subjected to catalase (CAT), glutathione peroxidase (GPx), and superoxide dismutase (SOD) activities analysis using commercial kits (Elabscience, USA) via colorimetric method. The results were determined using a microplate reader (BioRad, USA) at a wavelength of 560 nm [25].

2.8. Edwardsiella tarda Infection. At the end of the feeding trial, 10 fish from each replicate from every treatment were challenged with *E. tarda* infection. *Edwardsiella tarda* strain C7 used in this study was sourced from an earlier research [40]. The fish were exposed to the bacteria (1×10^8 cfu/mL) via intraperitoneal injection at a concentration recommended by Lee et al. [41]. The infected fish were continually fed with the designed diets for 4 weeks. The fish mortality was monitored daily, and their cumulative survival was calculated weekly. All the moribund and died due to the bacterial infection fish have symptoms such as abnormal swimming behavior, pale skin, and gross lesions on skin. A necropsy was

conducted on the dead fish by reisolating the bacteria from the fish liver by using xylose lysine deoxycholate (XLD, Hi Media, India) [42]. After 48 hr incubation period, the suspected clear colony bacteria with black at the center and reddish peripheral ring in diameter 1–2 mm was further confirmed with Gram staining, indole production, motility, oxidase, and catalase test. All the isolated bacteria were Gram negative, positive in indole production, motility, and catalase tests whereas they were negative in oxidase test. Therefore, they were identified as *E. tarda* that used in the bacterial challenge assay.

2.9. Statistical Analysis. All the data were checked using Kolmogorov–Smirnov test of normality and homogeneity of variances was checked using Levene’s test for equality of variances prior to the one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) followed by grouping using the Tukey post hoc test. Cumulative survival rate was analyzed through Kaplan–Meier and log rank tests. The significance level was set at $p < 0.05$, and data was presented as mean ± standard deviation (SD). The ANOVA and Kaplan–Meier tests were analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20.1 (IBM, USA).

3. Results

The effects of dietary EE on the growth performance of African catfish are shown in Table 1. After the 8-week feeding trial, all growth performance parameters (WG, $p < 0.0001$; SGR, $p < 0.0001$; HIS, $p < 0.0001$; VSI, $p < 0.0001$; and FCR, $p < 0.0001$) for EE-treated groups were significantly higher than the control group, particularly EE2 and EE3. However, experimental fish fed EE4 diet showed significantly lower than in all tested growth parameters compared to fish fed EE2 and EE3. The dietary EE treatment groups exhibited significantly lower HSI, VSI, and FCR than the control group, with the lowest being those fed with 2% and 3% EE, followed by 1% and 4% EE. Furthermore, EE-treated groups recorded significantly higher WBC count ($p < 0.0400$), RBC count ($p < 0.0002$), HGB concentration ($p < 0.0160$), and HCT ($p < 0.0200$) compared to the control (Table 2), led by EE2 and EE3 and followed by EE1 and EE4. No significant differences were observed in MCHC, MCH, LYM, and MON for all treatment groups in the current study. The water parameters of the aquaria during feeding trial were recorded as follows: temperature = 24–26°C, pH = 6.4–7.2, dissolved oxygen = 5.8–6.3 ppm, and ammonia <0.1 ppm.

TABLE 2: Blood parameters of experimental fish fed torch ginger, *Etilingera elatior*, flower bud powder diets for 8 weeks.

Blood parameters	Control	EE1	EE2	EE3	EE4
WBC count/ μL	112.1 \pm 9.88 ^a	124.6 \pm 12.86 ^{ab}	144.6 \pm 4.59 ^b	148.6 \pm 9.54 ^b	127.9 \pm 7.47 ^{ab}
LYM (%)	82.3 \pm 10.24	80.8 \pm 8.61	80.7 \pm 9.38	81.7 \pm 9.46	81.3 \pm 9.64
MON (%)	12.2 \pm 1.21	12.3 \pm 1.22	12.4 \pm 1.42	12.5 \pm 1.62	12.2 \pm 1.37
RBC ($\times 10^3/\mu\text{L}$)	2.17 \pm 0.21 ^a	2.43 \pm 0.38 ^a	3.90 \pm 0.53 ^b	4.03 \pm 0.42 ^b	2.67 \pm 0.15 ^a
HGB concentration (g/dL)	5.60 \pm 0.44 ^a	6.27 \pm 1.01 ^{ab}	7.87 \pm 0.40 ^b	7.83 \pm 0.76 ^b	6.30 \pm 1.04 ^{ab}
HCT (%)	23.7 \pm 2.91 ^a	27.7 \pm 1.69 ^{ab}	38.7 \pm 4.42 ^c	36.9 \pm 4.07 ^{bc}	26.8 \pm 4.63 ^a
MCH (pg)	29.7 \pm 3.75	32.1 \pm 3.55	30.7 \pm 1.98	32.4 \pm 4.09	30.7 \pm 7.84
MCHC (g/dL)	23.9 \pm 2.80	23.5 \pm 2.76	22.7 \pm 1.93	22.7 \pm 2.04	22.9 \pm 2.55

Note. Data expressed as mean \pm standard deviation. EE1, 2, 3, and 4 = 1%, 2%, 3%, and 4% of torch ginger, *Etilingera elatior*, flower powder diets. Values in the same row with different letters showed significant difference at $p < 0.05$. WBC, white blood cell; LYM, lymphocytosis; MON, monocytes; RBC, red blood cell count; HGB, hemoglobin concentration; HCT, hematocrit; MCH, mean corpuscular hemoglobin; and MCHC, mean corpuscular hemoglobin concentration.

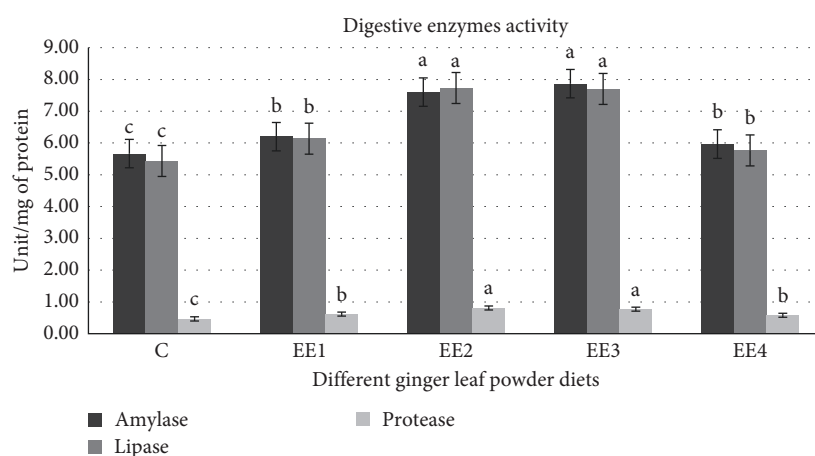


FIGURE 1: Comparative digestive enzymes activity of fish fed *Etilingera elatior* flower bud powder diets and control group for 8 weeks. Different letters on the bar are significantly different ($p < 0.05$).

Figure 1 illustrates the comparative digestive enzymes activities of EE-treated fish and the control group after 8 weeks. Overall, fish supplemented with dietary EE demonstrated significantly higher amylase (6.91 ± 0.83 unit/mg of protein; $p < 0.0090$), protease (0.70 ± 0.10 unit/mg of protein; $p < 0.0040$), and lipase (6.83 ± 0.89 unit/mg of protein; $p < 0.0060$) activities than the control group, particularly EE2 and EE3, followed by EE1 and EE4 (Figure 1). Antioxidative responses, including catalase (CAT; $p < 0.0100$), glutathione peroxidase (GPx; $p < 0.0300$), and superoxide dismutase (SOD; $p < 0.0100$), were significantly higher in EE-supplemented fish compared to the control group, with the highest being the EE2 and EE3, followed by fish fed EE1 and EE4 diet groups (Figure 2). Meanwhile, EE groups (EE1, $23.3\% \pm 5.77\%$; EE2, $66.7\% \pm 5.77\%$; EE3, $66.7\% \pm 5.77\%$; and EE4, $23.3\% \pm 5.77\%$) exhibited significantly ($p < 0.0001$) superior cumulative survival rates post-*E. tarda* infection compared to the control group ($3.3\% \pm 5.77\%$; Figure 3). *Edwardsiella tarda* was successfully isolated from liver of all the dead fish.

4. Discussion

This study investigated the impacts of EE flower buds as a feed additive on African catfish's growth performance and health

status by conducting a feeding trial, digestive enzyme activities analysis, hematological profiling, antioxidative responses, and disease resistance against *E. tarda* infection. Numerous studies have reported ginger as a feed supplement in aquatic animals. For instance, ginger supplementation enhanced the growth performance of Nile tilapia, *O. niloticus* [43]; black rockfish, *Sebastes schlegelii* [44]; common carp, *C. carpio* [21]; *L. rohita* [45]; and striped catfish, *P. hypophthalmus* [25]. This study is the first to report dietary EE as a feed additive in aquaculture.

The study findings revealed increased FW, WG, and SGR in African catfish after the 8-week EE treatment, possibly related to the activation of digestive enzymes, such as amylase, lipase, and protease, which promote digestion and absorption of amino acids. As a result, feed utilization is enhanced, and the fish growth rate is improved [25, 46]. This finding was supported by the significantly lower FCR in dietary EE groups compared to the control. The Zingiberaceae family, including EE, possesses bioactive compounds such as terpene and zingiberene, contributing to their distinct odor and flavor and enhanced palatability [47]. Gingerol, in particular, improved EE feed palatability and efficiency in the fish intestine [25], which explains the higher growth performance in EE-treated African catfish compared to the control group.

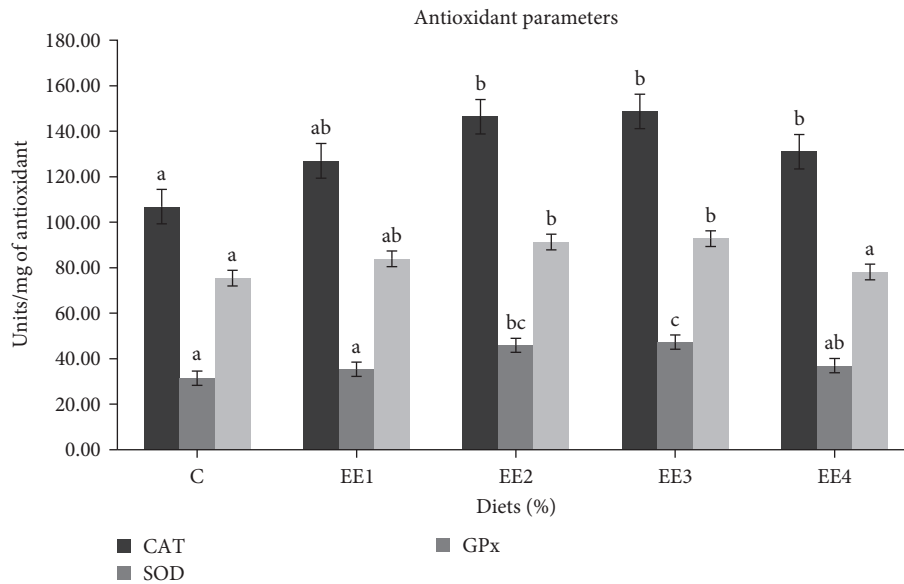


FIGURE 2: Comparative antioxidative response of fish fed *Etilingera elatior* flower bud powder diets and control group for 8 weeks. Different letters on the bar are significantly different ($p < 0.05$).

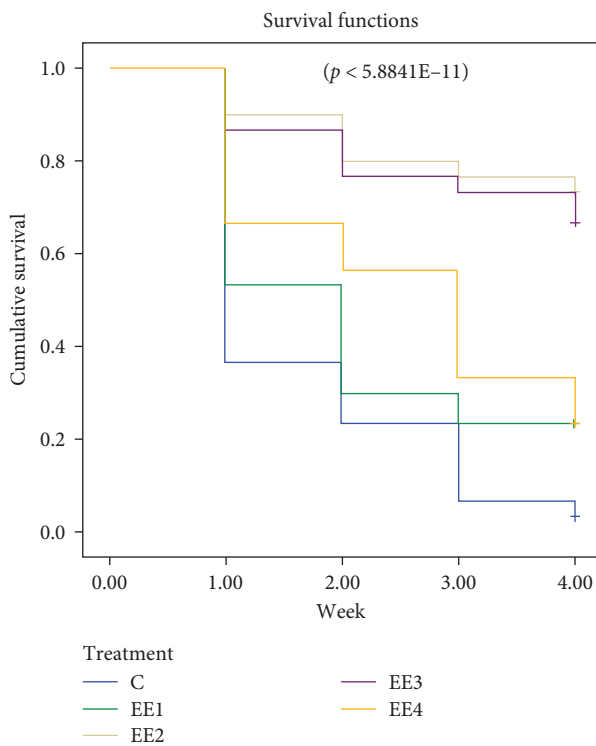


FIGURE 3: Kaplan–Meier cumulative survival plot of post-bacterial infection fish fed *Etilingera elatior* flower powder diets and control group for 8 weeks.

An earlier study found no significant difference in zebra-fish growth performance after dietary ginger supplementation [48], possibly attributed to the different ginger parts used, species, dose, and feeding period. In addition, the highest EE dose in the current study reduced African catfish’s growth performance, which could be attributed to the antilipogenic

effect. Other studies have shown that excessive *Citrus* spp. extract as a feed additive resulted in a growth decline in gilt-head seabream, *Sparus aurata* [49]; Nile tilapia, *O. niloticus* [24, 50]; and rainbow trout, *O. mykiss* [51]. In contrast, the lipogenic effect could benefit African catfish, as reflected by the low HSI and VSI in EE2 and EE3 treatment groups. Low HSI and VSI indicate less fat deposition in the fish liver and digestive system, which can be translated as the fish having more flesh. Flavonoid is the bioactive compound responsible for the antilipogenic effect, which is abundant in EE [50, 52, 53]. Therefore, the optimum dose of EE as a feed additive in African catfish is 2%–3%.

Dietary EE also enhanced the RBC count, HCT, and HBG of African catfish, indicating that EE catalyzes erythropoiesis and hemosynthesis activities in fish [54]. In addition, RBC count, HCT, and HBG enhancement are evidence of the absence of anemia and malnutrition in an aquatic species [48, 55, 56]. Furthermore, the good health status was confirmed by similarities in MCH and MCHC values among the experimental fish [56]. The EE diets also stimulated disease resistance against *E. tarda* infection, consistent with earlier studies that highlighted phytobiotics as a stress mitigation approach to prevent disease infection [18].

The antioxidative responses (SOD, CAT, and GPx) were significantly higher in fish fed with EE diets compared to the control group, indicating the role of EE in mitigating stress resulting from *E. tarda* infection in African catfish. The EE-treated groups exhibited a significantly higher cumulative survival rate post-*E. tarda* infection compared to the control group. Moreover, the findings were supported by the significantly higher WBC count readings in the blood samples of EE-treated groups than in the control group. An elevated WBC count is imperative in boosting the fish immune system against bacterial invasion [55]. Likewise, previous studies discovered that dietary ginger and its derivatives enhanced the

antioxidative capacity of striped catfish, *P. hypothalmus* [25]; *L. rohita* (Sukumaran et al., 2016); Nile tilapia, *O. niloticus* (Naliato et al., 2021); black rockfish, *S. schlegelii* [44]; and zebrafish, *Danio rerio* [48]. Furthermore, dietary ginger and its derivatives promoted the immunity of various fish species against other pathogens, including *A. hydrophila* (Naliato et al., 2021) and *Streptococcus iniae* [44]. In conclusion, dietary EE potentially enhances antioxidative responses and WBC count values in the fish blood to mitigate stress due to bacterial infection.

5. Conclusion

The EE flower bud diets improved the growth performance and health status of African catfish in this study. The optimum EE inclusion ranges from 2% to 3%, while excessive EE supplementation (4%) is detrimental for the African catfish. This study is the first to highlight the potential of EE as a feed additive in aquaculture, thus requiring further investigations to explore the benefits of EE on the growth and health of other aquatic species.

Data Availability

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Ethical Approval

The experimental design has been registered and approved under Faculty of Agro Based Industry, Universiti Malaysia Kelantan animal care and use committee with the code UMK/FIAT/ACUE/PG/07/2023.

Conflicts of Interest

All authors declare that they have unknown competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Authors' Contributions

Seong Wei Lee and Muhammad Anamul Kabir contributed to conceptualization, methodology, and investigation. Zulhisyam Abdul Kari, M. N. Azra, and Wendy Wee contributed to resources, data curation, and visualization. All authors contributed to writing the original draft and supervision. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Acknowledgments

The project was funded by Universiti Malaysia Kelantan (R/MTCH/A0700/00387A/009/2023/01161) and the Ministry of Higher Education, Malaysia (R/NRGS/A0.700/00387A/006/2014/00152).

References

- [1] L. S. Wei, K. Y. Hooi, M. I. Khoo, M. N. Azra, and W. Wee, "Effects of dietary kaffir lime, *Citrus hystrix* DC, leaf powder

- on the growth performance, digestive enzyme, hematology, antioxidative response, and disease resistance against *Edwardsiella tarda* infection in African catfish, *Clarias gariepinus*," *Aquaculture International*, 2024.
- [2] K. W. Goh, Z. Abdul Kari, W. Wee et al., "Exploring the roles of phytobiotics in relieving the impacts of *Edwardsiella tarda* infection on fish: a mini-review," *Frontiers in Veterinary Science*, vol. 10, Article ID 1149514, 2023.
- [3] Y. Miniero Davies, M. G. Xavier de Oliveira, M. Paulo Vieira Cunha et al., "*Edwardsiella tarda* outbreak affecting fishes and aquatic birds in Brazil," *Veterinary Quarterly*, vol. 38, no. 1, pp. 99–105, 2018.
- [4] T. J. Abraham, P. K. Mallick, H. Adikesavalu, and S. Banerjee, "Pathology of *Edwardsiella tarda* infection in African catfish, *Clarias gariepinus* (Burchell 1822), fingerlings," *Archives of Polish Fisheries*, vol. 23, no. 3, pp. 141–148, 2015.
- [5] S. W. Lee, M. Najiah, W. Wendy, M. Nadirah, and S. H. Faizah, "Occurrence of heavy metals and antibiotic resistance in bacteria from internal organs of american bullfrog (*Rana catesbeiana*) raised in Malaysia," *Journal of Venomous Animals and Toxins including Tropical Diseases*, vol. 15, 2009.
- [6] S. W. Lee, M. Najiah, and W. Wendy, "Bacteria associated with golden pompano (*Trachinotus blochii*) broodstock from commercial hatchery in Malaysia with emphasis on their antibiotic and heavy metal resistances," *Frontiers of Agriculture in China*, vol. 4, no. 2, pp. 251–256, 2010.
- [7] S. W. Lee, M. Najiah, W. Wendy, A. Zahrol, and M. Nadirah, "Multiple antibiotic resistance and heavy metal resistance profile of bacteria isolated from giant freshwater prawn (*Macrobrachium rosenbergii*) hatchery," *Agricultural Sciences in China*, vol. 8, no. 6, pp. 740–745, 2009.
- [8] M. Najiah, S. W. Lee, W. Wendy, L. W. Tee, M. Nadirah, and S. H. Faizah, "Antibiotic resistance and heavy metals tolerance in gram-negative bacteria from diseased American bullfrog (*Rana catesbeiana*) cultured in Malaysia," *Agricultural Sciences in China*, vol. 8, no. 10, pp. 1270–1275, 2009.
- [9] L. Seong, W. Wee, Z. Manan et al., "A study of *Edwardsiella tarda* colonizing live Asian clam, *Corbicula fluminea*, from Pasir Mas, Kelantan, Malaysia with the emphasis on its antibiogram, heavy metal tolerance and genetic diversity," *Veterinarski Arhiv*, vol. 83, pp. 323–331, 2013.
- [10] S. W. Lee and W. Wendy, "Bacterial flora from a healthy freshwater Asian sea bass (*Lates calcarifer*) fingerling hatchery with emphasis on their antimicrobial and heavy metal resistance pattern," *Veterinarski Arhiv*, vol. 80, no. 3, pp. 411–420, 2010.
- [11] M. Li, X. Zhu, J. Tian, M. Liu, and G. Wang, "Dietary flavonoids from *Allium mongolicum* Regel promotes growth, improves immune, antioxidant status, immune-related signaling molecules and disease resistance in juvenile northern snakehead fish (*Channa argus*)," *Aquaculture*, vol. 501, pp. 473–481, 2019.
- [12] M. N. U. Rehman, Y. Wang, J. Pan et al., "Histological and molecular characterization of *Edwardsiella tarda* infection in Siamese crocodile (*Crocodylus siamensis*) hatchlings," *Aquaculture*, vol. 535, Article ID 736367, 2021.
- [13] J.-J. Wang and L. Sun, "*Edwardsiella tarda*-regulated proteins in Japanese flounder (*Paralichthys olivaceus*): identification and evaluation of antibacterial potentials," *Journal of Proteomics*, vol. 124, pp. 1–10, 2015.
- [14] S. Lee, M. Najiah, W. Wendy, and M. Nadirah, "Antibiogram and heavy metal resistance of pathogenic bacteria isolated from moribund cage cultured silver catfish (*Pangasius sutchi*) and red hybrid tilapia (*Tilapia* sp.)," *Frontiers of Agriculture in China*, vol. 4, no. 1, pp. 116–120, 2010.

- [15] S. W. Lee and W. Wendy, "Antibiotic and heavy metal resistance of *Aeromonas hydrophila* and *Edwardsiella tarda* isolated from red hybrid tilapia (*Oreochromis* spp.) coinfecting with motile aeromonas septicemia and edwardsiellosis," *Veterinary World*, vol. 10, no. 7, pp. 803–807, 2017.
- [16] V. Pandey, R. A. Hussain Bhat, S. Chandra et al., "Clinical signs, lethal dose and histopathological lesions in grass carp, *Ctenopharyngodon idella* experimentally infected with *Edwardsiella tarda*," *Microbial Pathogenesis*, vol. 161, no. Pt B, Article ID 105292, 2021.
- [17] F. M. M. Korn, F. I. A. El-Ela, U. K. Moawad, R. K. Mahmoud, and Y. M. Gadelhak, "Prevention of Edwardsiellosis in *Clarias gariepinus* using ginger and its nanoparticles with a reference to histopathological alterations," *Aquaculture*, vol. 539, Article ID 736603, 2021.
- [18] W. Wee, N. K. Abdul Hamid, K. Mat et al., "The effects of mixed prebiotics in aquaculture: a review," *Aquaculture and Fisheries*, vol. 9, no. 1, pp. 28–34, 2024.
- [19] L. S. Wei, K. W. Goh, N. K. A. Hamid, Z. A. Kari, W. Wee, and H. Van Doan, "A mini-review on co-supplementation of probiotics and medicinal herbs: application in aquaculture," *Frontiers in Veterinary Science*, vol. 9, Article ID 869564, 2022.
- [20] C. Wang, S. Wang, N. Zeng et al., "Effect of kelp powder on the resistance of *Aeromonas hydrophila* in the gut of hybrid snakeheads (*Channa maculata* ♀ × *Channa argus* ♂)," *Fish & Shellfish Immunology*, vol. 139, Article ID 108916, 2023.
- [21] G. Mohammadi, G. Rashidian, S. H. Hoseinifar, S. S. Naserabad, and H. V. Doan, "Ginger (*Zingiber officinale*) extract affects growth performance, body composition, haematology, serum and mucosal immune parameters in common carp (*Cyprinus carpio*)," *Fish & Shellfish Immunology*, vol. 99, pp. 267–273, 2020.
- [22] J. Ming, J. Ye, Y. Zhang et al., "Optimal dietary curcumin improved growth performance, and modulated innate immunity, antioxidant capacity and related genes expression of NF-κB and Nrf2 signaling pathways in grass carp (*Ctenopharyngodon idella*) after infection with *Aeromonas hydrophila*," *Fish & Shellfish Immunology*, vol. 97, pp. 540–553, 2020.
- [23] S. A. M. Sukri, Y. Andu, Z. T. Harith et al., "Effect of feeding pineapple waste on growth performance, texture quality and flesh colour of Nile tilapia (*Oreochromis niloticus*) fingerlings," *Saudi Journal of Biological Sciences*, vol. 29, no. 4, pp. 2514–2519, 2022.
- [24] R. A. Mohamed, Y. M. Yousef, W. F. El-Tras, and M. M. Khalafallaa, "Dietary essential oil extract from sweet orange (*Citrus sinensis*) and bitter lemon (*Citrus limon*) peels improved Nile tilapia performance and health status," *Aquaculture Research*, vol. 52, no. 4, pp. 1463–1479, 2021.
- [25] A. M. Ashry, M. M. Habiba, A. M. El-Zayat et al., "Effects of ginger (*Zingiber officinale*) on the growth performance, digestive enzyme activity, antioxidative response, and antibacterial capacity of striped catfish (*Pangasianodon hypophthalmus*) reared in outdoor conditions," *Aquaculture Reports*, vol. 33, Article ID 101760, 2023.
- [26] S. Bakhtiari Aqmasjed, M. M. Sajjadi, B. Falahatkar, and R. Safari, "Effects of dietary ginger (*Zingiber officinale*) extract and curcumin on growth, hematology, immunity, and antioxidant status in rainbow trout (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*)," *Aquaculture Reports*, vol. 32, Article ID 101714, 2023.
- [27] D. K. Chowdhury, N. P. Sahu, P. Sardar et al., "Feeding turmeric in combination with ginger or garlic enhances the digestive enzyme activities, growth and immunity in Labeo rohita fingerlings," *Animal Feed Science and Technology*, vol. 277, Article ID 114964, 2021.
- [28] Z. Fazelan, Y. A. Vatnikov, E. V. Kulikov, V. G. Plushikov, and M. Yousefi, "Effects of dietary ginger (*Zingiber officinale*) administration on growth performance and stress, immunological, and antioxidant responses of common carp (*Cyprinus carpio*) reared under high stocking density," *Aquaculture*, vol. 518, Article ID 734833, 2020.
- [29] G. Levy, D. Zilberg, G. Paladini, and S. Fridman, "Efficacy of ginger-based treatments against infection with *Gyrodactylus turnbulli* in the guppy (*Poecilia reticulata* (Peters)),," *Veterinary Parasitology*, vol. 209, no. 3–4, pp. 235–241, 2015.
- [30] I. Cardoso, M. Soares, C. Angelis et al., "Physiological and biochemical responses of Nile tilapia (*Oreochromis niloticus*) to acute trichlorfon exposure," *International Aquatic Research*, vol. 12, no. 4, pp. 243–253, 2020.
- [31] C. Soowannayan, D. N. C. Teja, P. Yatip et al., "Vibrio biofilm inhibitors screened from marine fungi protect shrimp against acute hepatopancreatic necrosis disease (AHPND)," *Aquaculture*, vol. 499, pp. 1–8, 2019.
- [32] Y.-H. Liu, Y. Zhao, D. Zhu, X. Wang, and Y. Yang, "1,8-cineole and ginger extract (*Zingiber officinale* Rosc) as stress mitigator for transportation of largemouth bass (*Micropterus salmoides* L.)," *Aquaculture*, vol. 561, Article ID 738622, 2022.
- [33] M. M. J. O. Wijekoon, R. Bhat, and A. A. Karim, "Effect of extraction solvents on the phenolic compounds and antioxidant activities of bunga kantan (*Etilingera elatior* Jack.) inflorescence," *Journal of Food Composition and Analysis*, vol. 24, no. 4–5, pp. 615–619, 2011.
- [34] S. J. T. Lachumy, S. Sasidharan, V. Sumathy, and Z. Zuraini, "Pharmacological activity, phytochemical analysis and toxicity of methanol extract of *Etilingera elatior* (torch ginger) flowers," *Asian Pacific Journal of Tropical Medicine*, vol. 3, no. 10, pp. 769–774, 2010.
- [35] Z. Abdul Kari, M. A. Kabir, K. Mat et al., "The possibility of replacing fish meal with fermented soy pulp on the growth performance, blood biochemistry, liver, and intestinal morphology of African catfish (*Clarias gariepinus*)," *Aquaculture Reports*, vol. 21, Article ID 100815, 2021.
- [36] N. K. A. Hamid, P. O. Somdare, K. A. Md Harashid et al., "Effect of papaya (*Carica papaya*) leaf extract as dietary growth promoter supplement in red hybrid tilapia (*Oreochromis mossambicus* × *Oreochromis niloticus*) diet," *Saudi Journal of Biological Sciences*, vol. 29, no. 5, pp. 3911–3917, 2022.
- [37] M. K. Zakaria, Z. A. Kari, H. Van Doan et al., "Fermented soybean meal (FSBM) in African catfish (*Clarias gariepinus*) diets: effects on growth performance, fish gut microbiota analysis, blood haematology, and liver morphology," *Life*, vol. 12, no. 11, Article ID 1851, 2022.
- [38] O. H. Lowry, N. J. Rosebrough, A. L. Farr, and R. J. Randall, "Protein measurement with the Folin phenol reagent," *Journal of Biological Chemistry*, vol. 193, no. 1, pp. 265–275, 1951.
- [39] I. G. Borlongan, "Studies on the digestive lipases of milkfish, *Chanos chanos*," *Aquaculture*, vol. 89, no. 3–4, pp. 315–325, 1990.
- [40] S. W. Lee, N. Musa, T. S. Chuah et al., "Antibiogram and plasmid profiling from *Edwardsiella tarda* isolated from freshwater fish in east coast Malaysia," *Journal of Sustainability Science and Management*, vol. 6, no. 1, pp. 19–27, 2011.
- [41] S. W. Lee, K. Y. Sim, W. Wendy, and A. K. Zulhisyam, "*Peperomia pellucida* leaf extract as immunostimulator in

- controlling motile aeromonad septicemia due to *Aeromonas hydrophila* in red hybrid tilapia, *Oreochromis* spp. farming,” *Veterinary World*, vol. 9, no. 3, pp. 231–234, 2016.
- [42] S. W. Lee and M. Najiah, “Phenotyping, genotyping, and whole cell protein profiling of *Edwardsiella tarda* isolated from cultures and natural habitat freshwater fish,” *American-Eurasian Journal of Agricultural & Environmental Sciences*, vol. 3, no. 5, pp. 681–691, 2008.
- [43] R. F. Naliato, P. L. P. F. Carvalho, I. S. T. Vicente et al., “Ginger (*Zingiber officinale*) powder improves growth performance and immune response but shows limited antioxidant capacity for Nile tilapia infected with *Aeromonas hydrophila*,” *Aquaculture Nutrition*, vol. 27, no. 3, pp. 850–864, 2021.
- [44] H. Y. Oh, T. H. Lee, D.-Y. Lee et al., “Dietary supplementation with ginger (*Zingiber officinale*) residue from juice extraction improves juvenile black rockfish (*Sebastes schlegelii*) growth performance, antioxidant enzyme activity and resistance to *Streptococcus iniae* infection,” *Animals*, vol. 12, no. 5, Article ID 546, 2022.
- [45] V. Sukumaran, S. C. Park, and S. S. Giri, “Role of dietary ginger *Zingiber officinale* in improving growth performances and immune functions of *Labeo rohita* fingerlings,” *Fish & Shellfish Immunology*, vol. 57, pp. 362–370, 2016.
- [46] W. Lai, S. Yang, X. Lin et al., “*Zingiber officinale*: a systematic review of botany, phytochemistry and pharmacology of gut microbiota-related gastrointestinal benefits,” *The American Journal of Chinese Medicine*, vol. 50, no. 4, pp. 1007–1042, 2022.
- [47] M. M. Özcan, “The effect of ginger (*Zingiber officinale*) powders at different concentrations on bioactive compounds, antioxidant activity, phenolic constituents, nutrients and sensory characteristics of wheat bread,” *International Journal of Gastronomy and Food Science*, vol. 28, Article ID 100532, 2022.
- [48] E. Ahmadifar, N. Sheikhzadeh, K. Roshanaei, N. Dargahi, and C. Faggio, “Can dietary ginger (*Zingiber officinale*) alter biochemical and immunological parameters and gene expression related to growth,” *Immunity and Antioxidant System in Zebrafish (Danio rerio) Aquaculture*, vol. 507, pp. 341–348, 2019.
- [49] J. M. G. Beltrán, C. Espinosa, F. A. Guardiola, and M. Á. Esteban, “Dietary dehydrated lemon peel improves the immune but not the antioxidant status of gilthead seabream (*Sparus aurata* L.),” *Fish & Shellfish Immunology*, vol. 64, pp. 426–436, 2017.
- [50] R. Oliveira e Silva, C. E. Copatti, G. A. Pereira et al., “Promotion of growth and resistance against *Aeromonas hydrophila* in Nile tilapia juveniles supplemented with *Citrus limon* extract,” *Aquaculture*, vol. 578, Article ID 740115, 2024.
- [51] R. Chekani, R. Akrami, Z. Ghiasvand, H. Chitsaz, and S. Jorjani, “Effect of dietary dehydrated lemon peel (*Citrus limon*) supplementation on growth, hemato-immunological and antioxidant status of rainbow trout (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*) under exposure to crowding stress,” *Aquaculture*, vol. 539, Article ID 736597, 2021.
- [52] M. Rahman, M. A. A. Mamun, S. S. Rathore et al., “Effects of dietary supplementation of natural Spirulina on growth performance, hemato-biochemical indices, gut health, and disease resistance to *Aeromonas hydrophila* of Stinging catfish (*Heteropneustes fossilis*) fingerling,” *Aquaculture Reports*, vol. 32, Article ID 101727, 2023.
- [53] C. Weil, F. Lefèvre, and J. Bugeon, “Characteristics and metabolism of different adipose tissues in fish,” *Reviews in Fish Biology and Fisheries*, vol. 23, no. 2, pp. 157–173, 2013.
- [54] M. Enis Yonar, S. M. Yonar, M. Ş. Ural, S. Silici, and M. Düşükcan, “Protective role of propolis in chlorpyrifos-induced changes in the haematological parameters and the oxidative/antioxidative status of *Cyprinus carpio*,” *Food and Chemical Toxicology*, vol. 50, no. 8, pp. 2703–2708, 2012.
- [55] E. Ahmadifar, M. A. O. Dawood, M. S. Moghadam, N. Sheikhzadeh, S. H. Hoseinifar, and M. S. Musthafa, “Modulation of immune parameters and antioxidant defense in zebrafish (*Danio rerio*) using dietary apple cider vinegar,” *Aquaculture*, vol. 513, Article ID 734412, 2019.
- [56] M. E. Yonar, S. Mişe Yonar, Ü. İspir, and M. Ş. Ural, “Effects of curcumin on haematological values, immunity, antioxidant status and resistance of rainbow trout (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*) against *Aeromonas salmonicida* subsp. *achromogenes*,” *Fish & Shellfish Immunology*, vol. 89, pp. 83–90, 2019.