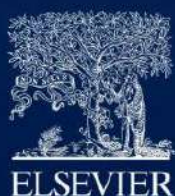
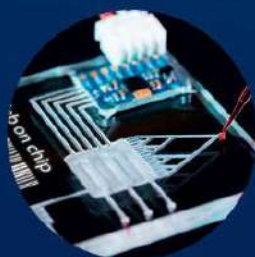


# HANDBOOK ON MINIATURIZATION IN ANALYTICAL CHEMISTRY

*Application of Nanotechnology*



**Edited by**  
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## Chapter 2

# Microfluidics in lipid extraction

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## 1. Introduction to biodiesel production from lipids

Vegetable oils have been widely tested to synthesize biodiesel. However, due to the exorbitant cost, the food versus fuel dilemma, and the requirement for acreage, the need to look for alternative substrates has become necessary [1]. To overcome the problems associated with vegetable oils, tree-based oils (TBOs) such as *Jatropha curcas*, *Pongamia pinnata*, *Simarouba glauca*, jojoba, etc. are now being used [2, 3]. Nevertheless, these TBOs are nonremunerative and it is expensive to maintain the plantations. Besides, they yield very low amount of lipids, which is a major setback for their efficient use as an alternative to biodiesel. To herald new options, oleaginous microbes are a promising option to consider for biodiesel production, as these are endowed with higher lipid productivity coupled with a desirable lipid combination using inexpensive carbon and nitrogen substrates. Moreover, they have no need for acreage, they are low maintenance, and there is no land versus fuel dilemma [4, 5]. Oleaginous microbes are defined as microbes that can synthesize 20% of lipid content on a dry weight basis using various inexpensive feedstocks [6]. These lipids are similar to vegetable oils and have great potential as an alternative substrate for biodiesel production. Biodiesel production from microbial lipids consists of several steps such as cultivation of oleaginous strains, lipid extraction (lipid synthesis is mostly intracellular), transesterification of lipids to fatty acid methyl esters (FAME), and purification of biodiesel (FAME). Every step in biodiesel production is very important and attention must be paid to the commercial viability of the process. Among oleaginous microbes, microalgae lipid extraction

comprises dewatering, aggregation of algal biomass, drying, and lipid extraction with green solvents [7].

Unlike microalgae, fungi and yeast biomass are readily accessible from nature; hence, they can easily be separated by filtration followed by drying and lipid extraction using green solvents and techniques. Lipid extraction is an important step that determines the quality of biodiesel [8, 9]. Since lipids are amphipathic in nature, optimization of the solvent system and the technique used are crucial parameters [10]. Furthermore, to minimize the amount of solvent and time used in the process, microfluidics can be deployed that have the potential to carry out the process in less time with reduced solvent usage [11]. Therefore optimization of the microfluidics method for each strain would be highly desirable for the development of a viable approach [6].

## 2. Positive attributes of microfluidics over existing technologies

The major pitfalls in existing microalgal bioproduct/biofuel research include high cost, labor intensity, low throughput, time consumption, and poor control over cell manipulation [12, 13]. Microfluidic systems leverage artificial tubular channels or reactors of micron size and rely on small volume manipulation in the range of microliters to picoliters, thereby reducing the large quantity of sample required or consumed. They consist of a polymer device made up of polydimethylsiloxane (PDMS) and drive devices. This combination enables researchers to automatize, miniaturize, and parallelize their study. Additionally, microfluidic systems offer researchers the opportunity to continuously monitor microbial cells in microenvironments with high-precision control at the single cell level, and open an avenue to perform high-throughput culture screening as well as lipid separation, biomass analysis, and cultivation [14–17] (Fig. 2.1). Because of their micron-scale dimension, microfabricated devices offer advantages like laminar flow [18], rapid diffusion [19], and thermal transport [20].

The last decade has seen a renewed importance in utilizing microfluidics in processes involved in industrial production [21, 22]. Additionally, recent developments in microfluidic technology have enabled us to categorize these

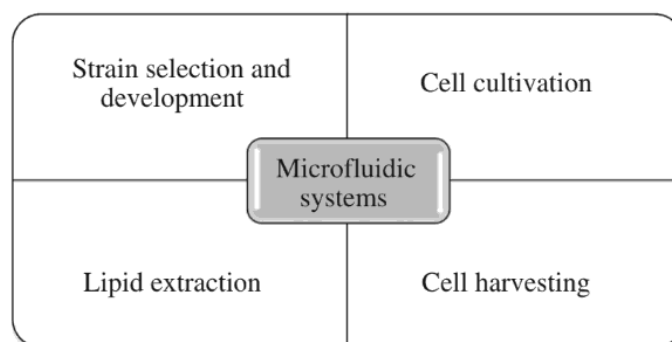


FIG. 2.1 Applications of microfluidic systems.

processes into microdetection, microseparation, microculturing, microdroplets, and microreaction. A wide gamut of research has already transformed a simple PDMS-based microfluidic device into a lipid separation unit. Berger et al. successfully separated chloroform from a lipid and oil suspension with an extraction efficiency of 93.5%–97.9% [23]. Interestingly, a two-layer microfluidic chip was developed by Bang et al. to extract lipids by the solid-phase extraction method, which also shows a very high recovery rate (95%–100%) [24].

“Oils” secreted from microbes are generating considerable interest and can be an ideal option for biofuel production. Most of the microorganisms, including yeast, microalgae, bacteria, and fungi, can be deployed for accumulating oils [25]. Roughly 2–8 million microalgal species are present in our ecosystem; however, only a small number of species have been reported so far [26, 27]. It is necessary to identify strains with better stress tolerance and yield. Conventionally, the microalgal samples collected from different locations are further identified through light microscopy and molecular biology techniques with bulky instruments in high-end laboratory settings.

Lim et al. demonstrated an energy-efficient and less labor-intensive way of cultivating *Chlamydomonas reinhardtii*, and analyzed lipid accumulation as well as separation using a microfluidic platform. Because of the controlled environment and reaction system, lipid separation efficiency is found to be much greater than in traditional bulk experiments [28]. Besides lipid extraction, Eu et al. designed a microfluidic device to monitor the cytotoxic response of microalgal cells and their lipid production under the influence of nitrogen [29].

Undoubtedly, by integrating cell culture, lipid production, and lipid extraction in a single microfluidic system a robust and multiplexed device for biomass products can be created. Kwak et al. used an intriguing approach by deploying an eight-chamber microfluidic device to carry out multiple processes from various microbial strains. Strikingly, lipid extraction efficiency was amenable with the traditional Bligh-Dyer method [30]. Bensalem et al. applied pulsed electric fields and mechanical stresses using microfluidic systems as a pretreatment method to enhance lipid extraction [31]. Another remarkable way of simplifying the lipid extraction procedure was proven with the assistance of superabsorbent polymers and microsystems. Interestingly, this method witnessed an increase in extraction rates [24]. With such diverse applications and benefits, certain microfluidic systems can be a potential alternative to conventional cell culture reaction systems, and considered as an unprecedented tool in current biomass analysis, lipid extraction, strain selection, and biofuel research.

### 3. Ideal characteristics of microfluidic devices

The rule of thumb for microfluidic devices relies on the manipulation of samples by decreasing or downsizing the device lengths (preferably micron scale) and also possessing the following characteristics. First, surface phenomena, including surface charge and capillary forces, dominate gravitational forces, which

leads to passive actuation of samples. Second, fluid flow will always be laminar (due to low Reynolds number) offering a reliable liquid/liquid interface analysis and also generating large concentration gradients at single cell resolution. Third, smaller dimensions enable researchers to utilize less reagent or assay volume (picoliter) as well as manipulate monophasic and multiphase systems in a single device with the scope for massive parallelization in resource-limited settings. Because of their advantages like portability, better sensitivity, low cost, faster analysis time, and less sample and space consumption, different microfluidic platforms (pressure driven, centrifugal, electrokinetic, and acoustic-based) have outweighed conventional bulk experiments for bio(chemical) and industrial assays [32, 33].

#### **4. Design of microfluidic devices in lipid extractions from microalgae/oleaginous microbes**

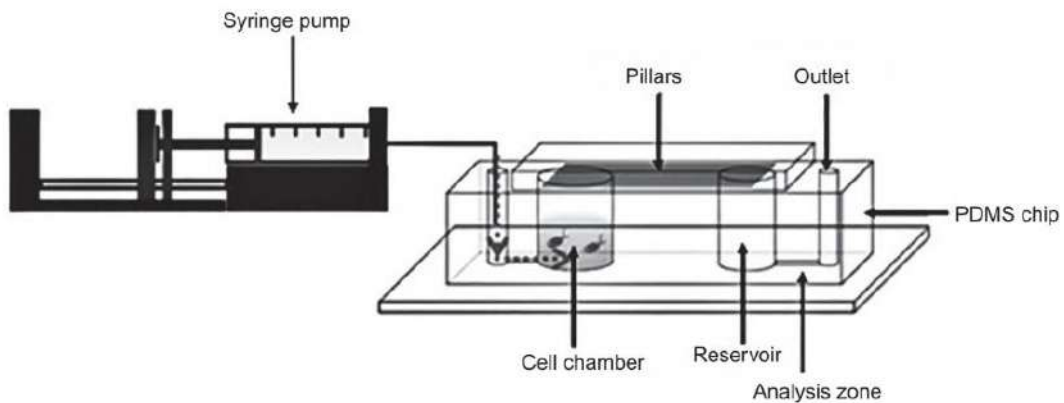
The production of biofuels from microalgae or oleaginous microbes should be economically viable. Conventionally used benchtop methods for culturing microalgae or oleaginous microbes, collecting accumulated lipids, and extracting lipids are often time-consuming and tedious processes.

Development of microfluidic platforms over the last two decades has helped in the extraction of lipids from numerous microalgae species with high productivity. Microfluidics also provides a platform for quantitative analysis of the extracted lipids. Numerous integrated microfluidic platforms have been developed to efficiently perform multiple steps on a single chip, from culturing microalgae to the extraction of lipids. In this section, we will discuss some of these commonly used microfluidic designs for lipid extraction from microbes and microalgae.

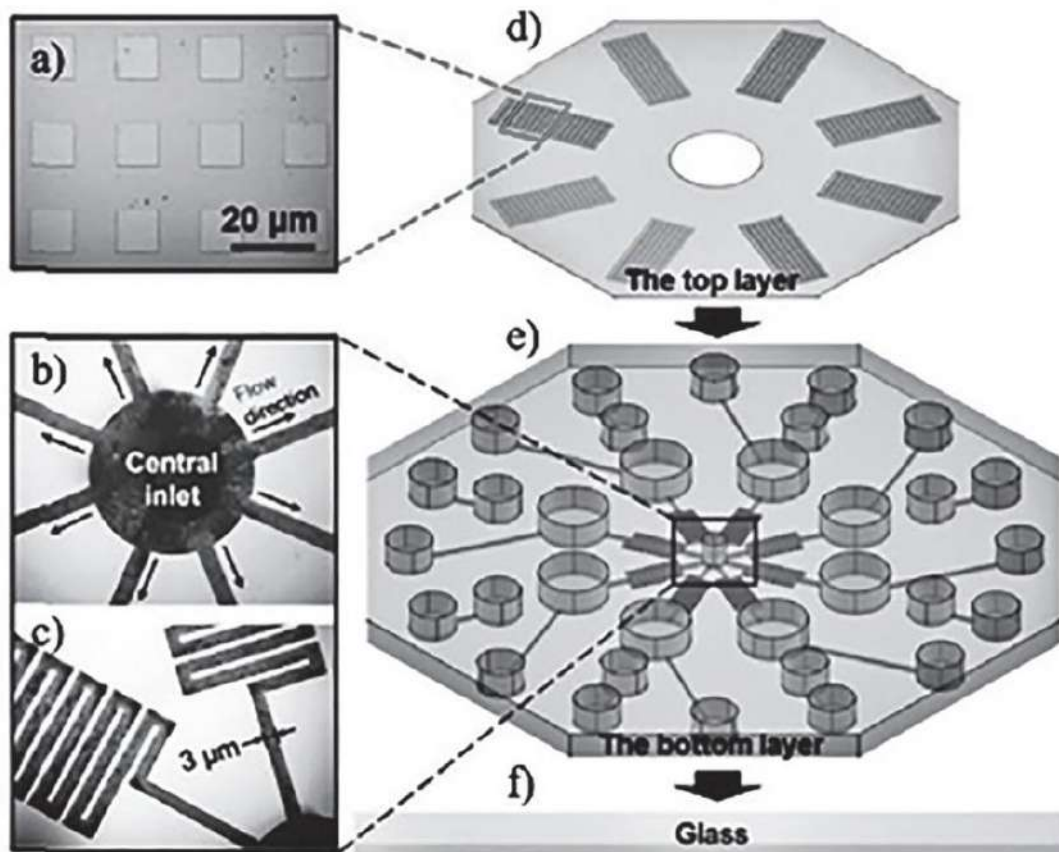
##### **4.1 Reservoir with filter design**

In this type of lipid extractor, cell growth and lipid collection are carried out in two separate chambers. A microfluidic filter connects these two chambers. The microfluidic filter blocks cell debris and allows only produced lipids to go through. Fig. 2.2 represents a simple design in this approach by Lim et al. [28]. Fig. 2.2 shows the complete setup for the collection of lipids from microalgae. The syringe pump first seeds the microalgae into the cell chamber along with media. After seeding, culture is allowed to grow for 4 days. Next, during the next 4 days of the induction period, the syringe pump is used to feed nitrogen-deficient media. Finally, solvents (ethanol and isopropanol) are pumped for the extraction of lipids.

The debris from microalgae are separated from lipids using a rectangular pillar filter. Here, any kind of microfluidic filter should work but preferably one that does not clog because it will allow the user to reuse the microfabricated device. To improve the efficiency of collected lipids, multiple reservoir and filter designs can be connected in a circular manner, as shown in Fig. 2.3. Kwak et al. [30] used a



**FIG. 2.2** Schematic representation of the reservoir with filter design. The syringe pump is used to load buffer, lysing solution, and lipid extraction solution into the microfluidic chip. The cell chamber is used to culture microalgae. The pillar filter is used to separate debris from lipid. The reservoir is used for accumulation of lipid. The analysis zone is used to analyze lipid quality. The device is based on two-level lithography and bottom and top glass sealing.



**FIG. 2.3** Concentrically arranged reservoir and filter design. (A) A rectangular pillar filter with 10µm pillars. (B) Common central inlet for inserting different media using a syringe pump. (C) Coregulated channel to prevent cell leakage. (D) The top layer of the device with filter pillars. (E) PDMS chip with multiple reservoirs and channels connecting them. (F) Bottom glass for analysis. (Modified and adopted from H.S. Kwak, J.Y.H. Kim, S.C. Na, N.L. Jeon, S.J. Sim, *Multiplex microfluidic system integrating sequential operations of microalgal lipid production*, *Analyst* 141 (2016) 1218–1225.)

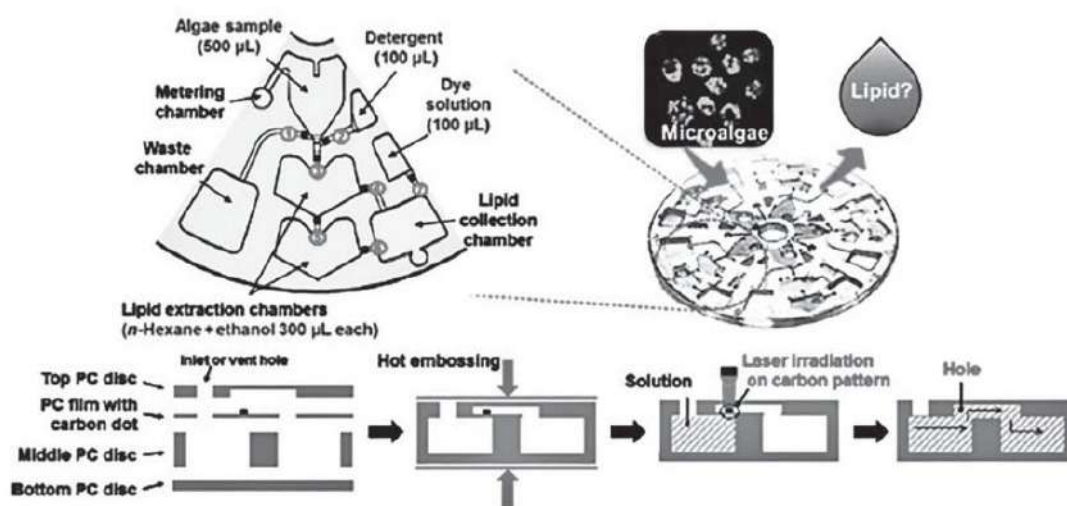
concentric design with a central inlet and eight chips around the inlet (Fig. 2.3B). The top glass has a rectangular pillar filter array with  $10\ \mu\text{m}$  gaps. Circular and linear alignment with the reservoir is critical in such a design. The  $3\ \mu\text{m}$  corrugated channel is used to connect the central inlet with the culturing reservoir (Fig. 2.3B). The groove in the channel increases the path length and hydrodynamic resistance. Thus the corrugated channel helps to prevent cell leakage. The cell chambers are 8 mm in diameter and 10 mm deep. The output lipid collection chamber is 4 mm in diameter and 10 mm in height.

Another major advantage of using multiple reservoirs with filter design is to optimize the culturing conditions such as temperature, salt concentration, starvation, etc. In that case, instead of a common inlet, there could be one inlet per reservoir. Alignment and two-level lithography are the two major drawbacks of the reservoir and filter design.

## 4.2 Lab-on-a-disc design

In lab-on-a-disc designs, sequential steps of lipid extraction from microalgae are automated with the help of centrifugal force and valves. Fig. 2.4 shows one such design, where carbon valves are irradiated using a laser.

As shown in Fig. 2.4, lab-on-a-disc has five sections for lipid extraction and quantification from microalgae. There are chambers for sample inlet, lipid extraction, and collection. Reagents, dyes, and waste are also stored in the same disc. The disc is fabricated by hot embossing four layers that contain flow channel, inlets, valving polycarbonate (PC) film, and vent holes. The carbon dot



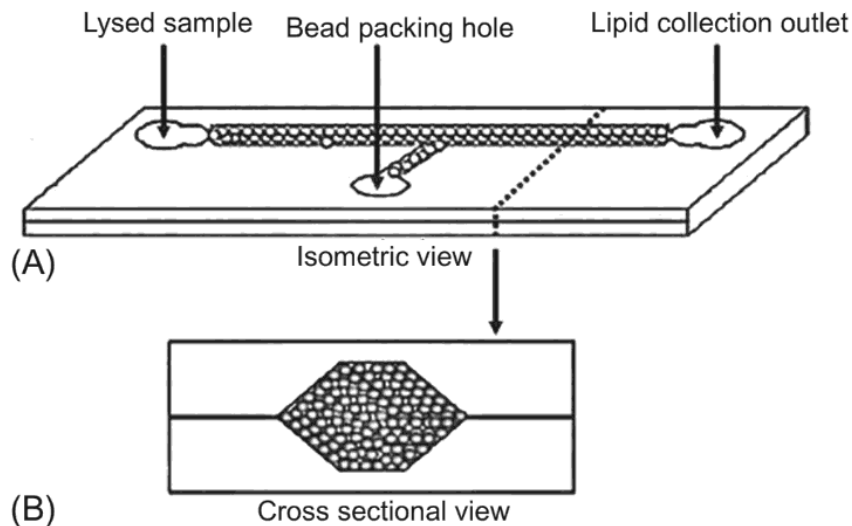
**FIG. 2.4** Schematic illustration of a lab-on-a-disc platform for lipid extraction using microalgae. Four layers of polycarbonate (PC) disc are hot embossed along with a carbon pattern for valving purposes. The holes are drilled using CNC machining. Laser irradiation on a carbon pattern is used to open up the valve. Once the valve is open the liquid is carried to the next chamber because of centrifugal force. (Modified and adopted from Y. Kim, S.N. Jeong, B. Kim, D.P. Kim, Y.K. Cho, *Rapid and automated quantification of microalgal lipids on a spinning disc*, *Anal. Chem.* 87(15) (2015) 7865–7871.)

in PC film is burnt using laser irradiation, which allows the sample to flow through. A 500  $\mu\text{L}$  algae sample is loaded into the chip. Spin speeds of 6000 and 3000 rpm are used alternatively along with shaking (6 Hz at an angle of 5 degrees) and 13 valves are used to extract lipid from microalgae within 13 min. This method is based on mixing lysate and microalgae samples.

The valving and the speed of rotation help in achieving timely operations for lipid extraction purposes. Though the method is very fast (13 min), it requires four layers of complex fabrication and a rotating mechanism with vibration support.

### 4.3 Bead-packed microchannel design for lipid extraction

In this kind of design, microbeads are packed into the microchannels such that the debris of lysed microalgae are blocked and only lipid is extracted from the lipid collection outlet. Sun et al. designed a similar microfluidic chip [34] as shown in Fig. 2.5. An isometric view of the bead-packed microchannel is shown in Fig. 2.5A. The bead-packing hole is used to load the 15  $\mu\text{m}$  beads inside the microchannels. The lysed samples are fed to the chip using a syringe pump, and lipid is collected at the lipid collection outlet while the bead-packing hole is kept blocked. Fig. 2.5B shows a cross-sectional view of the channel. The channel is 200  $\mu\text{m}$  high and has a 100  $\mu\text{m}$  flat channel with a total channel width of 300  $\mu\text{m}$ . The idea behind this design is a simple chip that can filter microalgae



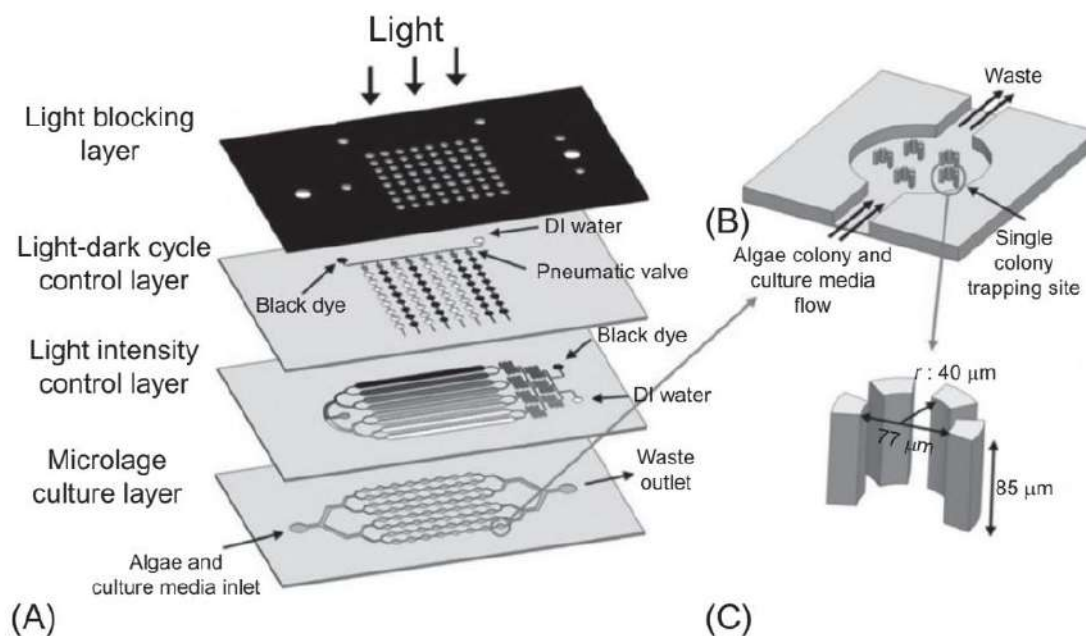
**FIG. 2.5** Design schematic of bead-packed microfluidic device. (A) Isometric view of the microfluidic device. The device has a lysed sample inlet, bead-packing hole, and lipid collection outlet. The bead-packing hole is only used initially to load the bead into the channels and remains blocked during lipid extraction. (B) Cross-sectional view of the channel showing the hexagonal structure. The channel height is 200  $\mu\text{m}$ , the flat channel width is 100  $\mu\text{m}$ , and the total channel width is 300  $\mu\text{m}$ . Beads are 15  $\mu\text{m}$ . (Modified and adapted from T. Sun, S. Pawlowski, M.E. Johnson, *Highly efficient microscale purification of glycerophospholipids by microfluidic cell lysis and lipid extraction for lipidomics profiling*, *Anal. Chem.* 83(17) (2011) 6628–6634.)



debris and allow the user to control the gaps between the beads using a bead-packing hole. This design lacks the on-chip cell lysing facilities and also need to utilize injection with valves to pump the sample and cell lysing reagents.

#### 4.4 U-shaped trap split-channel design

The U-shaped trap is useful when the user needs to observe lipid production and accumulation inside microalgae. A single U-shaped trap with four pillars was designed by Bodénès et al. [35]. Fig. 2.6 shows a schematic representation of the U-shaped trap split-channel design. The split channel helps to improve throughput. The design involves four light-blocking layers of fabrication and valving at suitable light wavelengths. The second layer is the cycle-controlled layer that allows light and dark cycles by pneumatically controlling deionized (DI) water and black dye simultaneously. The third layer is a gradient layer that controls light intensity using black dye and DI water. The last layer consists of the microalgae culture layer with U-shaped traps with a  $77\ \mu\text{m}$  radius of curvature for pumping the culture media. Although the proposed design allows the high-throughput screening of lipid production, it is difficult to achieve perfect alignment of the four layers. Also, multiple external units of syringe pumps are needed to perform the experiment.



**FIG. 2.6** High-throughput microfluidic U-shaped trap to monitor microalgal lipid production and accumulation. (A) The design layers of the microalgal culture monitoring chip. The four layers were composed of a light blocking layer, cycle-controlled layer, light intensity-controlled layer, and microalgae culture layer. (B) Enlarged view of a single culture compartment with multiple U-shaped trapping size. (C) A single microalgae trapping site composed of four micropillars. (Modified and adapted from P. Bodénès, H.Y. Wang, T.H. Lee, H.Y. Chen, C.Y. Wang, *Microfluidic techniques for enhancing biofuel and biorefinery industry based on microalgae*, *Biotechnol. Biofuels* 12(1) (2019) 33.)

#### 4.5 Confined impinging jet mixer design

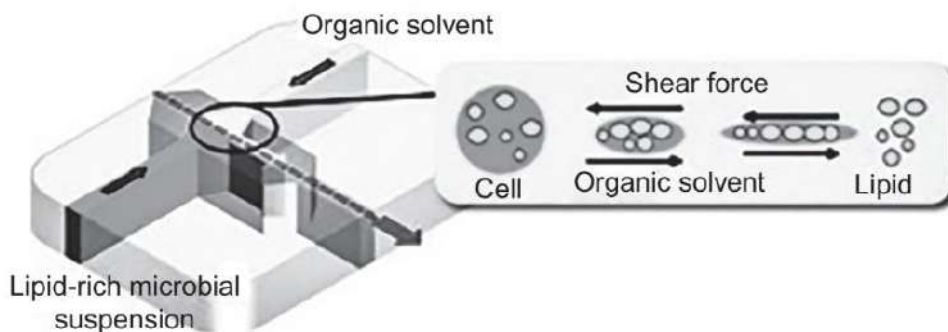
The confined impinging jet mixer design is used to burst the cell using shear force to extract lipids from it. Tseng et al. [36] designed a lipid extraction method using a microfluidic-confined impinging jet mixer. Fig. 2.7 shows a schematic representation of a confined impinging jet mixer where organic solvent and lipid-rich microbial suspension are mixed in the central round chamber. At the exit, due to confinement, the oleaginous cells experience a high shear force that eventually breaks them apart, and lipid is extracted. Though it is a very simple design, it depends greatly on shear force for its operation. The design lacks the provision for filtering the cell debris, which allows the passage of oleaginous cells into the lipid stream.

### 5. Lipid extractions from microalgae and oleaginous microorganisms

The lipid extraction process is an important step, which incurs 90% of energy as per the life cycle assessment of the microalgal biodiesel process [7]. Moreover, in the conventional lipid extraction process, a solvent system such as chloroform:methanol has been widely used, which requires a huge amount of solvent and time. To address these issues, microfluidic-based lipid extraction is highly desirable because of the miniaturization of the equipment, highly efficiency solvent usage, and the process can be performed quickly.

Lim et al. [28] developed an in situ double-layered PDMS device for lipid extraction from *C. reinhardtii*. In this setup a microcolumn with micropillars (made of PDMS) was used not only for lipid extraction but also to retain the microalgae cells in the bioreactor for the extraction process. Unlike conventional solvent systems (chloroform and methanol), in this study, ethanol and isopropanol were used, since the chloroform solvent can easily absorb chloroform [3, 37].

Pertinent to the efficiency of the lipid extraction process, isopropanol and ethanol have shown to be less efficient than chloroform and methanol solvents.



**FIG. 2.7** Schematic of the confined impinging jet mixer [36]. The algae from the left and solvent from the right are mixed in the central chamber. The mixed sample then exits from the confining outlet.

Besides, the composition of extracted lipids showed that isopropanol and ethanol result in higher polyunsaturated fatty acids (C18:3) than chloroform:methanol, which showed a higher content of saturated fatty acids (C16:0, C20:0). This study showed the potential of microfluidics to integrate various steps like cultivation of microalgae, estimation of lipids (electroporation), and the lipid extraction process. However, the major drawbacks for effective implementation are the incompatibility of polymers studied for reaction and extraction conditions, upscaling of microfluidic cell concentration, and the cell lysis process. The common polymers studied for molding microchannels using poly(methyl methacrylate) and PDMS are nonresistant and react with NaOH, particularly in the transesterification process. To address these problems, future studies of microfluidics should envisage to use of inert materials such as ceramics [38], silicon, and glass [39, 40] for microalgal extraction and transesterification processes.

Recent research attempts at utilizing microfluidics for lipid extraction are summarized in Table 2.1.

## 6. Future prospects

Microfluidic intervention lipid extraction technology is capable of solving existing algal-biorefinery problems and helps in the upgradation of the lipid-based biofuel sector by addressing biofuel substrate depletion. Microfluidic intrusion in lipid extraction has been greatly enhanced through research into the development of compatible molding polymers, which can withstand extraction conditions. The compatibility issue has been studied through the utilization of inert materials (silicon, glass, ceramics) to develop microfluidic devices for better utilization in lipid extraction [35, 44]. Moreover, better lipid extraction efficiency is possible by studying the emulsion (due to the presence of hydrophilic solutions and organic solvents)-related problems by mainly focusing on reducing the contact area between the hydrophilic and hydrophobic phases of the lipid extraction system. Microfluidic-based lipid extraction has to be practiced on pilot-scale studies, which paves the way for industrial exploitation of microfluidics in the biorefinery sector [6, 45].

## 7. Conclusion

The better utilization of algal and oleaginous microbial lipids alleviates the current scenario of substrate scarcity in the biorefinery sector. Many researchers are working actively for better utilization of rheology-based microfluidics in microalgal technology and oleaginous biorefinery for enhanced results from the lipid extraction process. The profound knowledge attained through the extensive intrusion of microfluidics in proteomic research has to be applied to the development of better microfluidic devices for lipid extraction. The successful development of better microfluidic devices for lipid extraction helps to reduce the cost of algal- and oleaginous-based biofuels. More research is anticipated to

**TABLE 2.1** Research attempts at lipid extraction through microfluidics technologies.

Source of microbial lipid	Microfluidic device characteristics	Enhanced yield/array of compounds	Any other relevant data	References
Adenocarcinomic human alveolar basal epithelial cells (A549)	Three-layered microfluidic device [two polydimethylsiloxane (PDMS) layers were attached to an indium-tin oxide-coated glass] for cell capture	> 90% cell occupancy with single-cell occupancy of ~ 25%	Not suitable for single-celled organisms	[41]
<i>Sulfurospirillum barnesii</i> strain SES-3 cells	T-shaped channel, 300 $\mu\text{m}$ W $\times$ 200 $\mu\text{m}$ D, Schott Boro float glass based	Six major classes of phospholipid	Suitable for subsequent lipidomics analysis	[34]
<i>Chlamydomonas reinhardtii</i> CC503 (cw92 mt+), CC124 (mt- agg-1 nit1 nit2), and CC4348 (BAF-J5; cw15 arg7-7 nit1 nit2 sta6-1::ARG7)	PDMS-based two-layer device (top layer has a microchannel filled with an array of square micropillars (5 $\mu\text{m}$ H $\times$ 100 $\mu\text{m}^2$ CSA $\times$ 10 $\mu\text{m}$ of interspacing) and bottom layer is a cell-capturing chamber)	Enhanced lipid extractions yielded by using 70% aqueous isopropanol	Suitable for a broad range of microbial sources	[28]
<i>Phaeodactylum tricornutum</i> in F/2 medium	2D-hydrofocusing microfluidic chip was fabricated (total volumetric flow of ~ 220 $\mu\text{L}/\text{min}$ ) and attained a 260 mm/s typical cell velocity	Real-time measurement of photosynthetic efficiency (as Fv/Fm) and lipid accumulation (as Nile Red fluorescence)	Suitable for lipid extraction with stressed algal systems	[42]
<i>Chlorella vulgaris</i>	Fabrication of dielectrophoresis device	The operating conditions seem to be 1.4–2.95 mS/cm conductivity, 1–20 MHz operating frequency, and a crossover frequency of 11 wt% lipid content	Suitable for sorting and harvesting of high lipid content	[43]

develop an integrated process of lipid extraction coupled with online monitoring of extracted lipid analysis.

## Websites

<https://microfluidics-master.fr/>

<https://ufluidix.com/circle/microfluidic-companies/>

<https://web.uvic.ca/~kelvira/>

<https://www.elveflow.com/microfluidic-tutorials/microfluidic-reviews-and-tutorials/microfluidics-for-dna-analysis-pcr/>

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