FECES TO FERTILIZER: AN INNOVATIVE VERMICOMPOSTING METHOD FOR ENVIRONMENTALLY SUSTAINABLE FAECAL SLUDGE MANAGEMENT

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A thesis submitted to the Department of Civil Engineering in partial fulfillment for the degree of Bachelor of Science in Civil Engineering

Department of Civil Engineering

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147/I, Green Road, Dhaka-1215, Bangladesh

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DECLARATION

It is now declared that this thesis/project or any part of it has not been submitted elsewhere for any degree or diploma award.

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Dedicated

to

"The dedicated environmental engineering researchers and engineers whose tireless efforts illuminate the path towards a sustainable future. Your unwavering commitment to science and innovation inspires us to dream bigger and strive for a healthier planet."

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ABSTRACT

Urbanization and rapid population growth worldwide have increased the amount of organic waste, especially fecal sludge (FS), which presents problems for traditional waste management techniques like landfilling and incineration. In Bangladesh, where FS management is a relatively new concept, sludge treatment plants in suburban areas and towns, supported by organizations like WaterAid Bangladesh and the Bangladesh Association for Social Advancement, have proven effective. Notably, the Sakhipur Municipality's facility, operational since 2016, has successfully treated FS and organic waste, producing high-quality compost sold to local farmers through co-composting. Vermicomposting of fecal sludge is an eco-friendly solution that addresses sanitation challenges, provides agricultural benefits, and reduces environmental impact by diverting sludge from landfills. Despite its advantages, careful management is crucial to address concerns about pathogens, requiring proper pre-treatment and optimal conditions for earthworm activity, along with cultural sensitivities for public acceptance of recycled waste use.

The research employed a comprehensive approach, combining quantitative and qualitative data from diverse sources. The Sakhipur FSTP in Tangail was visited, and information was gathered from journals, articles, videos, photos, and reports in the laboratory phase, the collection of a 5kg dried fecal sludge sample from Sakhipur FSTP prioritized safety precautions for vermicomposting. The Soil Resource Development Institute (SRDI) in Khamar Bari, Dhaka, conducted standard lab tests on approximately 250 grams of compost after 45 days, following established procedures and conducting multiple tests for each parameter to minimize errors. In the vermicomposting process, 900g of cow dung was utilized as organic solid waste, combined with fecal sludge at a 1:3 ratio. The resulting compost exhibited favorable characteristics, including a dry, dark gray appearance, absence of unpleasant odors, and satisfactory color and moisture levels. Physiochemical assessments revealed a mature compost with a pH of 8.32, a high Electrical Conductivity (EC) of 8.1 mS/cm (potentially due to sodium chloride dissolution), Total Organic Carbon (TOC) at 14.60%, and Total Organic Nitrogen (TON) at 2.1%, all falling within standard ranges. The C/N ratio of 7.35:1, below the 20:1 limit set by the Bangladesh Ministry of Agriculture, indicates suitability for soil enrichment. Analysis from the Soil Resource Development Institute (SRDI) in Dhaka confirmed acceptable levels of heavy metals such as lead (26 ppm) and nickel (8 ppm), along with other chemical constituents like phosphorus, potassium, and sulfur, within standard limits. In conclusion, utilizing fecal sludge as compost or soil conditioner yields a nutrient-rich product suitable for household-level horticultural use, as affirmed by SRDI's findings. The study emphasizes the role of vermicomposting in sustainable fecal sludge management and highlights its promising potential for treating fecal sludge. The article highlights the need to recognize limitations and advocates for more research and development to strengthen vermicomposting's contribution to environmental sustainability, public health, and global sanitation, even though it presents strong evidence.

TABLE OF CONTENT

LIST OF FIGURES

LIST OF TABLES

CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background and Motivations

The rapid growth of the global population and urbanization has led to a surge in the generation of organic waste, including fecal sludge (FS)[1]. Traditional waste management methods, such as landfilling and incineration, have significant environmental and health drawbacks [2]. Landfilling occupies vast areas of land, contributes to greenhouse gas emissions, and may lead to leachate contamination of groundwater. Incineration releases air pollutants, including harmful gases like dioxins and furans. The concept of managing fecal sludge is relatively novel in Bangladesh. The capabilities of sludge treatment plants in suburban regions, secondary towns, or Pourashavas are remarkable. As the national lead agency, the Department of Public Health Engineering (DPHE) delivers drinking water supply, sanitation, drainage, and waste management services in urban and rural areas, excluding cities served by WASAs. DPHE has successfully introduced cost-effective technology for fecal sludge treatment and a well-equipped sludge transport system in several Pourashavas across Bangladesh. The Department of Public Health Engineering (DPHE) estimated in 2020 that there were approximately 150 operational FSTPs across Bangladesh. This number likely includes larger, centralized plants.

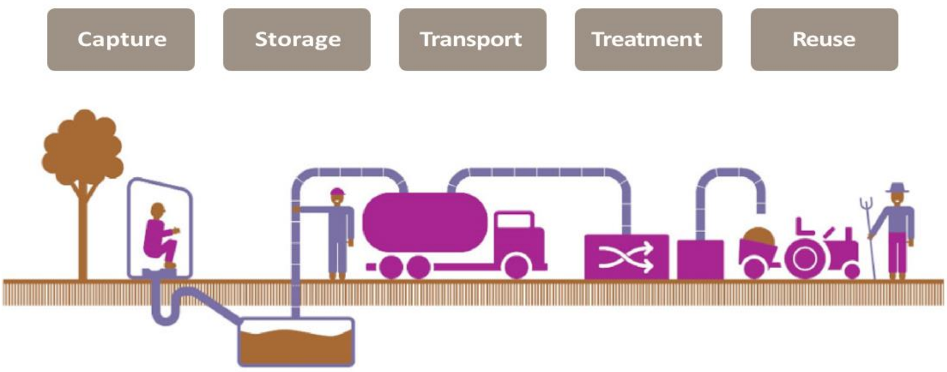

Figure 1- 1. Fecal Sludge Treatment Process in Bangladesh

WaterAid Bangladesh (WAB) and the Bangladesh Association for Social Advancement (BASA) have provided technical and financial assistance to Sakhipur Municipality. This support enabled the municipality to assess the situation, explore possible solutions, and establish a co-composting plant in 2015. The facility became operational in 2016 and is designed to treat fecal sludge and organic waste, yielding high-quality compost sold to local farmers.

Figure 1- 2. Sakhipur Fecal Sludge Treatment Plant

Managing fecal sludge (FSM) is a severe sanitation issue in many developing nations. Insufficient sanitation infrastructure leads to the untreated disposal of fecal sludge into landfills and rivers, endangering the environment and human health. Fecal sludge treatment can be achieved sustainably and effectively via vermicomposting, which turns organic waste into nutrient-rich compost through worms. Vermicomposting offers a sustainable and eco-friendly approach to managing organic waste. So, vermicomposting of fecal sludge can be an excellent management solution. It is a biological process that utilizes earthworms to break down organic materials into nutrient-rich vermicompost [3]. Vermicompost is a valuable soil amendment that improves soil structure, enhances water retention, and increases nutrient availability for plant growth. Vermicomposting, a natural biological process involving earthworms and microorganisms, offers a sustainable and environmentally friendly approach to managing organic waste. Earthworms consume organic matter, converting it into a stable humus-like material called vermicompost. Vermicompost is enriched in nutrients, beneficial microorganisms, and humus, making it an excellent soil amendment for improved crop productivity and health.

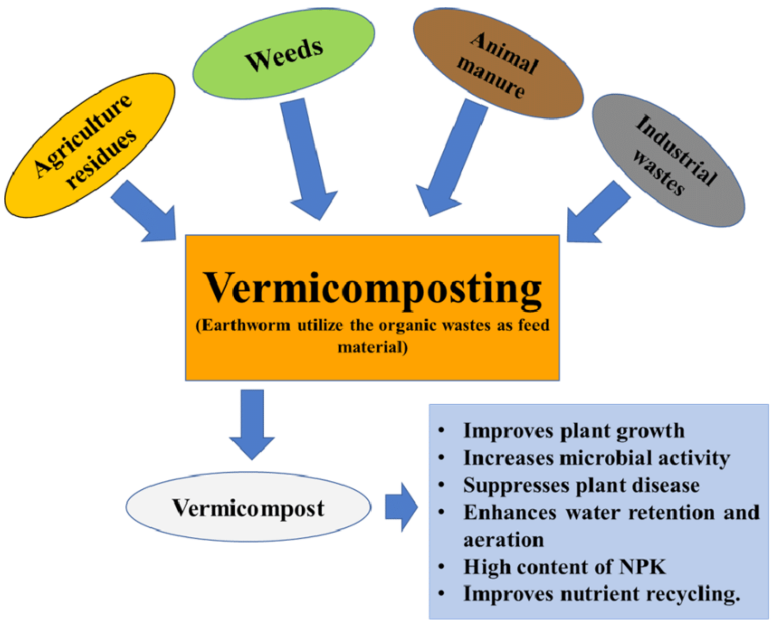

Figure 1- 3. Vermicomposting Procedure

1.1.1 Advantages of Vermicomposting

- **Environmentally friendly:** Vermicomposting reduces the environmental impact of organic waste, minimizing pollution and greenhouse gas emissions.
- **Sustainable resource recovery:** Vermicompost is a valuable nutrient source for agricultural purposes, reducing the reliance on chemical fertilizers.
- **Resource optimization:** Vermicomposting converts waste materials into valuable products, promoting resource efficiency and circular economy principles.
- **Economic benefits:** Vermicompost can be produced on a small or large scale, providing income opportunities for farmers and entrepreneurs.

1.1.2 Fecal Sludge as a Substrate for Vermicomposting

For decades, fecal sludge has posed sanitation and environmental challenges, polluted waterways, and health risks. But a fascinating transformation is emerging: vermicomposting – the humble earthworm's mighty feat of converting this waste into a valuable resource.

Fecal sludge, a by-product of wastewater treatment, is a suitable substrate for vermicomposting. It contains high levels of organic matter and nutrients, including nitrogen, phosphorus, potassium, and micronutrients [4]. However, fecal sludge may require pretreatment to reduce pathogens and heavy metals before being used in vermicomposting. Once deemed unusable, fecal sludge becomes a nutrient-rich haven for plant growth. Vermicomposting harnesses the power of earthworms, nature's tiny alchemists, to decompose and stabilize this organic matter. As they burrow and munch, these industrious creatures churn the sludge, aerating it and creating a thriving ecosystem of microbes. Bacteria break down complex organic molecules, fungi provide structure, and actinomycetes decompose stubborn cellulose. This dynamic dance results in a metamorphosed material – vermicompost.

Figure 1- 4. Earthworms

Far from the malodorous sludge it once was, vermicompost is a dark, crumbly, odorless treasure trove of nutrients. It boasts higher nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium levels than traditional compost, making it a potent fertilizer for gardens and agricultural lands. This enriched soil nourishes plants, improves water retention, suppresses soil-borne diseases, and enhances biodiversity.

The benefits of vermicomposting fecal sludge extend beyond the realm of agriculture. It offers a sustainable and cost-effective way to manage sanitation needs, particularly in regions lacking proper infrastructure. Diverting sludge from landfills and treatment plants reduces greenhouse gas emissions and protects water quality. This sustainable loop closes the circle, transforming waste into a resource that fosters healthy soil and food security.

However, challenges remain. Concerns about pathogens lingering in the final product necessitate careful management of the process, including pre-treating the sludge and maintaining optimal conditions for earthworm activity. Additionally, public perception and cultural sensitivities surrounding the use of recycled waste require tactful communication and education.

Despite these hurdles, the potential of fecal sludge vermicomposting is undeniable. It offers a glimmer of hope for a future where sanitation and environmental protection go hand in hand. By embracing this innovative approach, we can turn a waste problem into a resource revolution, enriching our soils, fostering food security, and safeguarding our planet for future generations.

Figure 1- 5. Dried Fecal Sludge

1.1.3 Benefits of Vermicomposting Fecal Sludge

Vermicomposting fecal sludge offers several benefits:

- **Reduces waste volume and environmental impact:** Vermicomposting diverts organic waste from landfills, reducing greenhouse gas emissions and pollution.
- **Produces nutrient-rich vermicompost:** Vermicompost is a valuable soil amendment that improves soil structure, nutrient content, and water-holding capacity.
- **Promotes sustainable agriculture:** Vermicompost can reduce the reliance on chemical fertilizers and promote sustainable agricultural practices [5].
- **Provides economic opportunities:** Vermicompost production can generate income for farmers and entrepreneurs.

1.1.4 Considerations for Vermicomposting Fecal Sludge

To ensure successful vermicomposting of fecal sludge, consider the following factors:

- **Substrate quality:** Fecal sludge should be free from excessive moisture, heavy metals, and pathogens.
- **Earthworm selection:** Suitable species such as *Eisenia fetida* and *Eisenia Andrei* should be used.
- **Vermicomposting conditions:** Maintain optimal moisture, temperature, and aeration levels in the vermicomposting system.
- **Monitoring and adjustments:** Monitor the vermicomposting process and make adjustments to ensure optimal conditions.

1.2 Research Objectives and Overview

The primary objective of this thesis is to investigate the efficacy of vermicomposting as a sustainable approach for managing fecal sludge while generating a valuable soil amendment. Specifically, the research aims to address the following objectives:

- To assess the feasibility of using vermicomposting to treat and recycle fecal sludge.
- To determine the quality of vermicompost produced from fecal sludge and its suitability as a fertilizer.
- To develop and optimize vermicomposting technologies for fecal sludge management.

This thesis will explore the multifaceted aspects of vermicomposting fecal sludge, exploring its potential as a sustainable waste management and agricultural practice. The findings of this study will contribute to the advancement of knowledge in the field of vermicomposting and provide valuable insights for implementing this technology as a sustainable solution for organic waste management and resource recovery in agricultural settings.

1.3 Organization of the Thesis

Chapter 1: Introduction and Objective.

This thesis aims to investigate the effectiveness of vermicomposting as a sustainable method for handling fecal sludge, focusing on generating a valuable soil amendment [6]. The specific objectives include assessing the feasibility of vermicomposting for fecal sludge treatment and recycling, determining the quality of the resulting vermicompost as a fertilizer, and developing and optimizing vermicomposting technologies for fecal sludge management. The research explores various aspects of vermicomposting fecal sludge, emphasizing its potential as a sustainable waste management and agricultural practice. The study's outcomes are expected to advance knowledge in vermicomposting and offer insights for implementing this technology as a sustainable solution for organic waste management and resource recovery in agricultural settings.

Chapter 2: Literature Review.

The literature review explores the potential benefits, challenges, and sustainable practices associated with vermicomposting as a waste treatment strategy, specifically focusing on its application in fecal sludge management. Vermicomposting, utilizing earthworms for organic matter decomposition, is a promising approach for treating the intricate waste stream of fecal sludge, known for its pathogenic content and environmental impact. The review also discusses advancements such as co-composting and integrated waste management systems, providing a forward-looking perspective on the vermicomposting industry. Emphasizing the intricate relationship between vermicomposting and fecal sludge treatment, the review aims to offer a comprehensive overview of current research in this crucial field.

Chapter 3: Methodology.

This chapter outlines the comprehensive methodology employed in the study, encompassing the collection of fecal sludge (FS), the vermicomposting system, and the analytical techniques for assessing compost parameters. The research design adopts a systematic approach to determine the feasibility, efficacy, and environmental implications of utilizing earthworms in the vermicomposting of fecal matter. The study integrates quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis using a mixed-methods strategy. Detailed information on FS and organic solid waste (OSW) collection and a brief discussion on sample storage for the vermicomposting process are provided. The procedures include relevant formulas and figures for clarity.

Chapter 4: Results and Discussion.

The composting process was successfully carried out, resulting in a dry, dark gray compost devoid of unpleasant odors. The alkaline nature of the compost was reflected in a consistently high pH, reaching 8.3 by the end. The elevated Electrical Conductivity (EC) of 8.09 mS/cm was attributed to potential sodium chloride dissolution, posing a potential risk to plants. Total Organic Carbon (TOC) and Total Organic Nitrogen (TON) fell within standard ranges at 14.64% and 2.00%, respectively. The C/N ratio 7.3:1 met maturity criteria, and effective pathogen reduction was observed. Heavy metal levels (Lead: 27 ppm, Nickel: 7 ppm) were below the standard limit of 30 ppm. Adequate levels of Phosphorus, Potassium, and Sulphur indicated nutrient-rich compost. The 45-day composting period yielded positive outcomes, and vermicomposting of organic waste, including cow dung and feces, is recommended for enhancing soil fertility and maintaining environmental cleanliness.

Chapter 5: Conclusions and Future Work.

Scaling up vermicomposting of fecal sludge may encounter challenges such as logistical issues, space constraints, and specialized equipment needs. The variability in feedstock composition, influenced by geographical and demographic factors, can impact the efficiency of the process. The selection of worm species must consider regional availability and environmental conditions. Although vermicomposting reduces pathogens, complete elimination may be inconsistent, suggesting additional processing methods are needed. Odor control strategies, such as biofilters, are essential for community acceptance. Nutrient content variations in vermicompost require understanding and mitigation. Achieving social and cultural acceptance involves investigating community perceptions and tailoring communication strategies. Despite the obstacles, the study's results strongly support vermicomposting as a viable and sustainable solution for managing fecal sludge. With continued research and development, vermicomposting is promising to enhance global sanitation, public health, and environmental sustainability.

CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

Fecal sludge management (FSM) remains a global challenge, particularly in developing countries like Bangladesh. The World Health Organization (2004) estimated that diarrheal diseases kill almost 1.8 million children under the age of five annually worldwide, and 10% of people in developing countries suffer from severe intestinal worm infections as a result of poor waste and excreta management (WHO, 2000) [7]. Conventional methods like landfilling or direct application pose environmental and public health risks. Throughout the world, especially in rural areas of developing nations, using processed or unprocessed human manure as fertilizer is a common practice because of its high organic content and plant nutrients [8]**.** Diverse methods, including vermicomposting, have been employed or recommended for human waste processing. Earthworm breeding, propagation, and utilization of castings are innovative vermiculture biotechnology disciplines that have become global waste recycling tools.

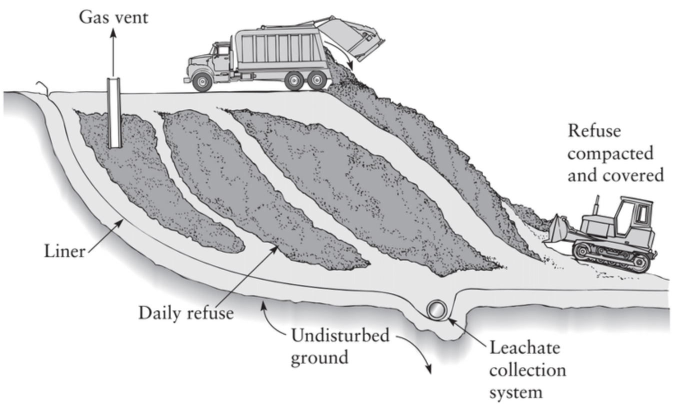

Figure 2- 1. Landfilling Procedure

2.2 Content

This chapter covers the findings from various earlier studies and research projects in the FSM fields. An emphasis on identifying necessary research related to the composting of fecal sludge derived from FS. With the help of previous studies, an idea of the per capita FS generation is presented. Several technologies are available for the treatment of FS. To make the treatment products safe for release into the environment or to create biosolids that can be utilized in agriculture without risk, feces sludge must be treated. Particular attention must be given to pathogen reduction and dewatering if the ultimate goal is to produce a dry product that can be utilized again in agriculture.

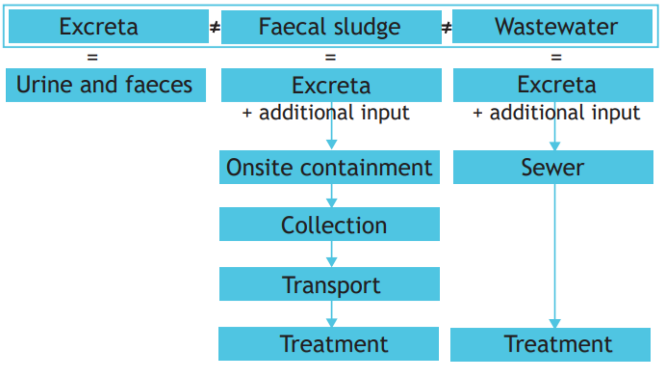

Figure 2- 2. Comparison of Manure and the Sanitation Service Chain for the Management of Fecal Sludge and Wastewater

2.2.1 Fecal Sludge

Fecal sludge, a semi-solid waste generated by on-site sanitation systems like septic tanks and pit latrines, comprises a blend of human excrement, wastewater, and organic materials. This has three main components – scum, effluent, and sludge. It has an offensive odor and appearance and contains significant grease, grit, hair, debris, and pathogenic microorganisms [9]. This fecal sludge represents a valuable resource with the potential for producing fertilizer, biogas, and other useful products. Nevertheless, it carries pathogens and harmful substances, making it crucial to ensure safe and sustainable management practices to safeguard both public health and the environment. Although containing pathogens and other toxic substances, fecal sludge is a valuable resource suitable for fertilizer production. Vermicomposting is a secure and efficient approach to composting fecal sludge, yielding a top-notch fertilizer.

Figure 2- 3. Dehydrated Feces Sludge

2.2.2 Characteristics of Fecal Sludge (FS)

The procedure of assessing and measuring the characteristics of feces sludge is known as fecal sludge characterization. The initial stage in developing treatment technologies for fecal sludge (FS) that will achieve specific treatment goals is to measure and describe the FS that needs to be addressed. The typical FS characteristics are challenging to determine due to the variety of onsite sanitation technologies, such as pit latrines, public ablution blocks, septic tanks, aqua privies, and dry toilets. Various technologies interact in many cities, and distinct technologies are typically more common in some geographic regions. Currently, there is a lack of comprehensive data regarding the properties of FS. Still, there's a lot of research being done in this area [10]. The length of storage, surrounding temperature, groundwater intrusion into vaults or pits of on-site sanitation installations, installation size, and tank emptying technique and schedule are all significant sludge quality factors. The FS characteristics from multiple observations are displayed in the following table [10].

Table 2- 1. Reported Characteristics of Fecal Sludge from Onsite Sanitation Facilities and Wastewater Sludge

Parameter	FS Source		WWTP Sludge	References
	Public Toilet	Septic Tank		
pH	1.5-12.6			(USEPA, 1994)
	6.55-9.34			(Kengne et al., 2011)
Total Solids, TS (mg/L)	52,500	12,000-35,000	-	(Koné & Strauss, 2004)
	30,000	22,000	-	(NWSC, 2008)
	-	34,106	-	(USEPA, 1994)
	≥3.5%	<3%	<1%	(Heinss, Larmie, & Strauss, 1998)
Total Volatile Solids, TVs (as % of TS)	68	50-73	-	(Koné & Strauss, 2004)
	65	45	-	(NWSC, 2008)

COD (mg/L)	49,000	1,200-7,800	-	(Koné & Strauss, 2004)
	30,000	10,000	7-608	(NWSC, 2008)
	20,000-50,000	<10,000	500-2,500	(Heinss, Larmie, & Strauss, 1998)
BOD (mg/L)	7,600	840-2,600	-	(Koné & Strauss, 2004)
	-	-	20-229	(NWSC, 2008)
Total Nitrogen, TN (mg/L)	-	190-300	-	(Koné & Strauss, 2004)
			32-250	(NWSC, 2008)
Total Kjeldahl Nitrogen, TKN (mg/L)	3,400	1,000	-	(Katukiza et al., 2012)
NH4 -N (mg/L)	3,300	150-1,200	-	(Koné & Strauss, 2004)
	2,000	400	2-168	(NWSC, 2008)
	2,000-5,000	<1,000	30-70	(Heinss, Larmie, & Strauss, 1998)
Nitrates, NO3 - (mg N/L)	-	0.2-21	-	Koottatep et al., (2005)
Total Phosphorus, TP (mg P/L)	450	150	9-63	(NWSC, 2008)
Faecal Coliforms (cfu/100 mL)	1x105	1x105	6.3x104 - 6.6x105	(NWSC, 2008)
Helminth eggs (Numbers/L)	2,500	4,000-5,700	-	(Heinss, Larmie, & Strauss, 1994)

	20,000-60,000	4,000	300-2,000	(Heinss, Larmie, & Strauss, 1998)
		600-6,000		(Ingallinella et al., 2002)
		16,000		(Yen-Phi et al., 2010)

2.2.3 Fecal Sludge Treatment Technologies

Achieving the goal of proper FS disposal requires using appropriate, environmentally sound technologies that should be long-lasting and affordable [7]. However, according to some recent studies, about 2.7 billion people, or one-third of the world's population, depend on on-site sanitation facilities, and by 2030, that number is expected to double. Proper management of fecal sludge is necessary for these facilities [11].

Several technologies are present for treating fecal sludge, and each technology has a distinct field of application. The desired result can determine the chosen treatment technology. Figure 2-4 shows various available treatment methods and the final utilization of byproducts in an FSTP [12].

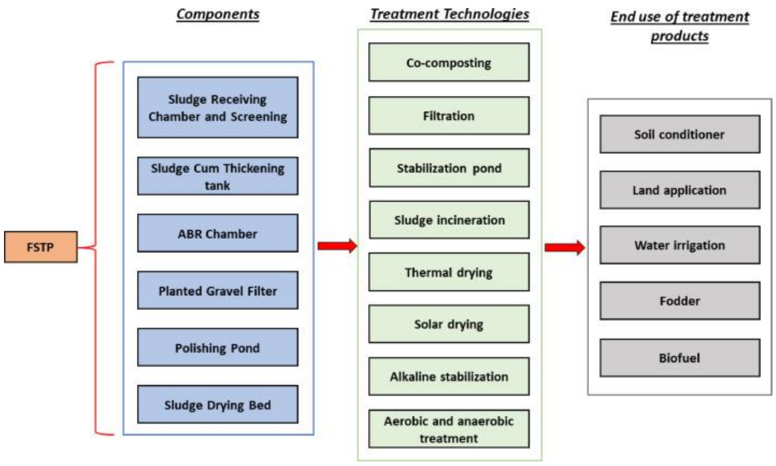

Figure 2- 4. Dehydrated Feces Sludge

According to estimates, India produces up to 25 million tons of urban solid waste annually, with a different composition [13]. India's first fecal sludge treatment plant (FSTP) was built recently in the Karnataka town of Devanahalli. The FSTP is built to handle 6 m^3 of the septage, from which manure is produced using treated sludge (CDD, 2016) [14].

Figure 2- 5. Devanahalli Fecal Sludge Treatment Plant (FSTP), India

Bangladesh has effectively achieved nearly complete elimination of open defecation. However, the country is currently dealing with the "second generation" problem of fecal sludge management (FSM), with only 32% of rural areas having "safely managed sanitation" and no estimate for urban areas [15]. To address this challenge, Sakhipur Municipality received technical and financial support from WaterAid Bangladesh (WAB) and the Bangladesh Association for Social Advancement (BASA) to analyze the situation, assess possible solutions, and establish a co-composting plant in 2015, which started operations in 2016. The plant processes organic waste and feces to create high-quality compost sold to nearby farmers [16].

Figure 2- 6. Co-composting Plant in Sakhipur, Bangladesh

2.2.4 Vermicomposting of Fecal Sludge

Vermicomposting is quicker to decompose organic materials than co-composting because it involves the cooperation of microorganisms and earthworms. Fecal sludge vermicomposting is expected to be an exciting and helpful waste management innovation. It's a concept to think about further, but it's crucial to consider the advantages and disadvantages that could arise. Pathogens will be significantly decreased if the vermicomposting process goes well. No studies on the integrated composting/vermicomposting of human fecal slurry have been published in the literature. In Ontario, Canada, vermicomposting was first introduced in 1970, and it currently processes roughly 75 tons of waste per week. Besides these, there are about 3000 other vermicomposting plants in Japan with 5-50 tones capacity per month. The time has come for Bangladesh to consider using Vermi technology on a commercial scale to manage fecal sludge.

Figure 2- 7. Vermicompost

2.2.5 Compost Standards in Bangladesh

A stabilized organic product that can be handled, stored, and applied to land safely by established guidelines is the result of proper treatment. Based on the national fertilizer standardization committee's recommendation, the government authorized the following specifications for organic fertilizer using the authority provided by section 7 of the Fertilizer (Management) Act, 2006.

Table 2- 2. Compost Standards in Bangladesh

Parameter	Content
Physical	
Color	Dark grey to Black
Physical condition	Non-granular form
Odor	Absence of foul odor
Moisture	Moisture
Chemical	
pH	5.0-8.5
Organic Carbon	10-25%
Total Nitrogen (N)	0.5-4.0%
C: N	Maximum 20:1
Phosphorus (P)	0.5-1.5%
Potassium (K)	1.0-3.0%
Sulfur (S)	0.1-0.5%
Zinc (Zn)	Maximum 0.1%
Copper (Cu)	Maximum 0.05%
Arsenic (As)	Maximum 20 ppm
Chromium (Cr)	Maximum 50 ppm
Cadmium (Cd)	Maximum five ppm
Lead (Pb)	Maximum 30 ppm
Mercury (Hg)	Maximum 0.1 ppm
Nickel (Ni)	Maximum 30 ppm
Inert Material	Maximum 1%

Source: Fertilizer (Management) Act 2006 and Compost Standards of Ministry of Agriculture, Government of Bangladesh for use in agricultural purposes

2.2.6 Legal and Regulatory Framework for Fertilizer

The following Acts, Rules, Ordinances, and guidelines provided the legal and regulatory framework for the production, storage, marketing, sales, and use of Fertilizers:

- Fertilizer (Control) Ordinance, 1999
- Fertilizer Dealer Appointment & Fertilizer Distribution Integrated Policy, 2009
- Clarification of Fertilizer Dealer Appointment & Fertilizer Distribution Integrated Policy (From 2009 to 2011)
- Fertilizer (Management) Act, 2006
- Fertilizer (Management) Guidelines, 2007
- Fertilizer (Management) (Amendment) Ordinance, 2008
- Fertilizer (Management) (Amendment) Act, 2009
- Non-Urea Fertilizer Import, Sell and Subsidy Disbursement Procedure
- Fertilizer (Management) Guidelines, 2007 Amendment

2.2.7 Terms and Conditions Pertaining Registration of Organic Fertilizer

1. Any organic fertilizer produced must come from organic sources; it is not hospital waste, among others. The application form filed for standardization (or standard setting) must mention the name and sources of the raw materials used in the organic fertilizer.
2. The Fertilizer Technical Sub-Committee shall arrange laboratory tests for at least three nominated laboratories during a standardization process. By the Fertilizer (Management) Act 2006, two members of BARI/BINA/SRDI appointed by the chair of the Technical Sub-Committee and representative(s) from DAE shall inspect physically and collect random samples on-spot during the physical inspection of the production facility and procedure of the organic fertilizer at this moment applied for standardization on behalf of Fertilizer Technical Sub-Committee [17].
3. The laboratories of five (5) government-designated institutions (BARI, BINA, SRDI, BSTI, and Dhaka University) will use Tyurin's Method (1931/1936) as a unified method to determine the amount of Organic Carbon [17].
4. The application form for registration or specification must include C omplete information regarding the production process, including anaerobic, aerobic, and semi-aerobic technologies.
5. Following registration, the production of organic fertilizer will be verified by the designated laboratories by examining random samples that the DAE

representative(s) collected from the open market. In case of any discrimination based on the specified specifications, legal action will be pursued by the nation's current laws.

6. In Bangladesh, importing, marketing, distributing, or using any organic fertilizer made outside the country is forbidden.
7. Using the Integrated Plant Nutrient System (IPNS) techniques, an economic analysis must be conducted to confirm the efficacy of organic fertilizers [17].

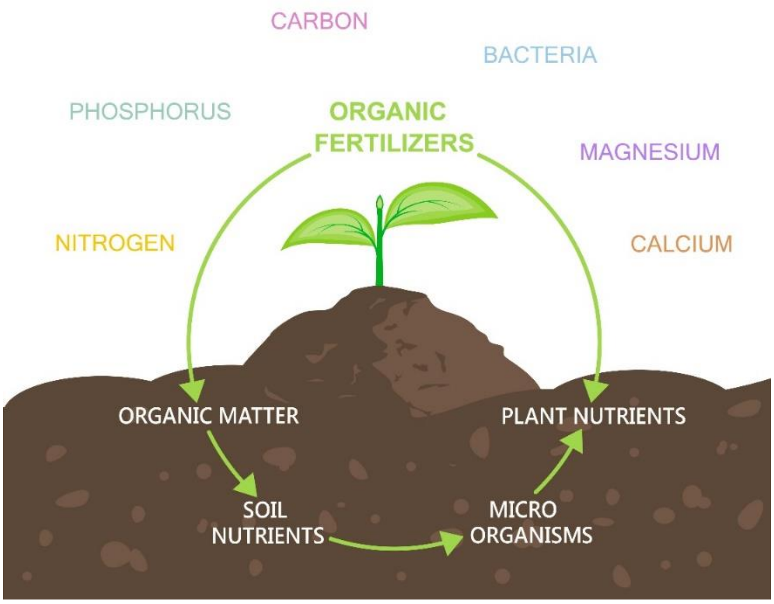

Figure 2- 8. Cycle of Organic Fertilizer

2.2.8 Key Factors of the Composting Process

The practice of vermicomposting, which involves using earthworms to break down organic waste into nutrient-rich compost, depends on carefully balancing several essential variables. Ensuring effective decomposition, robust worm populations, and superior compost is achieved by optimizing these factors. These are the main variables that impact the biological decay processes and the final compost quality. Among them are:

- Moisture: Earthworms are sensitive to moisture, requiring a content between 60-80% for optimal activity. Too dry, and they become dehydrated and inactive;

too wet, and they suffocate. Regular monitoring and adjustments with water are crucial [18].

- Temperature: 15–25°C (59–77°F) is the ideal range for most species of vermicomposting. While low temperatures slow down decomposition, excessively high temperatures stress and kill worms. Suitability can be maintained with the help of insulation and shading [19].
- pH: Earthworms prefer slightly acidic to neutral pH levels (6.5-7.5). Extreme acidity or alkalinity can be detrimental to their health.
- Aeration: The respiration and decomposition of earthworms depend on a sufficient supply of oxygen. Enough air circulation is ensured by bedding material mixing and proper ventilation [20].
- Carbon-to-Nitrogen (C/N) Ratio: The feedstock's C/N ratio influences the compost's quality and rate of decomposition. Effective vermicomposting requires a balanced C/N ratio of 25:1 to 30:1.
- Worm Species: The ideal conditions for temperature, moisture, and food vary throughout earthworm species. Choosing the suitable species for the feedstock and climate in that region is crucial [19].
- Predators and Pathogens: Keeping a healthy worm population requires reducing the presence of potential pathogens through appropriate hygiene and temperature control and minimizing the presence of predators like centipedes and birds.

2.3 Summary

This literature review aims to shed light on the potential advantages, difficulties, and sustainable practices related to this innovative waste treatment strategy by examining the complex relationship between vermicomposting and fecal sludge management. Vermicomposting, a biological process that utilizes earthworms to decompose organic matter, has gained significant attention as a viable method for treating fecal sludge, a complex waste stream notorious for its pathogenic content and environmental implications. New developments and innovative techniques like co-composting and integrated waste management systems are also addressed to give a forward-looking view of the vermicomposting industry. In addition, this literature review delves into the complex relationship between vermicomposting and fecal sludge treatment to offer an in-depth overview of the present status of research in this crucial field.

CHAPTER 3
METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the overall procedures involved in this research, from collecting the fecal sludge (FS) sample to the vermicomposting system and the methods used to determine the compost parameters**.**

The research design for this study on vermicomposting with fecal sludge involves a comprehensive and systematic approach to assess the feasibility, efficiency, and environmental impact of utilizing earthworms in the decomposition of fecal sludge. The study employs a mixed-methods design, incorporating quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis techniques. This chapter goes into great detail about the collection of organic solid waste (OSW) and FS. Then, a short discussion on how the sample was stored for the vermicomposting process. As appropriate, the procedures are provided with the relevant formulas and figures.

Figure 3- 1. Dried Fecal Sludge

3.2 Methodology Overview

The potential of vermicomposting, an environmentally friendly and sustainable waste management method, to treat fecal sludge has drawn attention. This project aims to create an enhanced vermicomposting procedure designed especially for handling feces.

3.2.1 Preliminary Data Collection

Multiple sources were taken into consideration for both quantitative and qualitative data. The Sakhipur FSTP in Tangail was visited to begin this process. Moreover, some journals, articles, videos, photos, and reports were taken into consideration for data collection. Initially, published literature from websites and books and various pieces from government and non-governmental organizations were gathered and organized. Then, semi-structured key informant interviews were conducted to enhance or supplement existing literature, and in some cases, information was gathered through the observation technique. However, the data were collected from three different sources – documents, interviews, and observations.

Figure 3- 2. Visit to the FSTP in Sakhipur, Bangladesh

3.2.2 Sample Collection

The initial phase of the laboratory process involved the collection of dried fecal sludge, a pivotal step in the research. The utmost significance is placed on the proper handling and transportation of the collected sample, making it a crucial aspect of the study. The primary material gathered was 5kg of dried fecal sludge produced at Sakhipur FSTP, with meticulous attention given to comprehensive safety measures for its intended use in vermicomposting. Special emphasis was placed on prioritizing safety precautions throughout the collection process. The collected sample was specifically chosen from the FSTP, ensuring its suitability for vermicomposting purposes.

Figure 3- 3. Sample Collection of Fecal Sludge

3.2.3 Methodology of Vermicomposting with Fecal Sludge

1. **Selecting a Suitable Container or Bed:** Choose a muddy tub with adequate ventilation for vermicomposting. The container has drainage holes at the bottom to prevent waterlogging.

Figure 3- 4. Tub (Selected for Vermicomposting Bed)

2. **Preparation of Fecal Sludge:** Use 300 grams of pre-treated and sanitized dried feces from the Sakhipur Faecal Sludge Treatment Plant (FSTP) for vermicomposting. The treated feces, free of hazardous pathogens, provide a safe and optimal substrate for earthworm activity, facilitating the decomposition of organic matter. This sustainable practice not only repurposes waste materials but also ensures a hygienic and environmentally friendly vermicomposting process.

Figure 3- 5. Processing the Fecal Sludge

3. **Preparation of Organic Solid Waste**: Use cow dung as the organic solid waste. For vermicomposting, 900g of cow dung were used.

Figure 3- 6. Processing the Organic Solid Waste (Cow Dung)

4. **Mixing Fecal Sludge with Cow Dung**: In a distinct container, mix the fecal sludge and cow dung in a ratio of about 1:3. This blend provides a well-balanced combination of nutrients and organic matter for the earthworms. By combining the fecal sludge and cow dung in this specific proportion, an optimal environment is created for the earthworms to thrive. The mixture not only ensures a rich nutrient content but also serves as an effective source of organic matter. The balanced composition supports the earthworms' well-being and enhances their ability to break down and decompose the materials. The specified ratio of 1:3 strikes an ideal balance in providing essential elements for the earthworms' growth and activity.

Figure 3- 7. Mixing Procedure of Fecal Sludge with Cow Dung

5. **Adding Fecal Sludge and Cow Dung Mixture:** Evenly distribute the cow dung and feces mixture over the bedding layer. This mixture initiates the composting process and provides the earthworms with their main food supply.

Figure 3- 8. Fill the Tub with the Mixture of Cow Dung and Feces

6. **Moistening the Bed:** Lightly water the vermicomposting bed (approximately 50gm per day) to create a damp, but not soggy, environment. Earthworms require moisture to survive and facilitate the decomposition process.

Figure 3- 9. Watering the Bed

7. **Introducing Earthworms:** Gently place the earthworms on top of the prepared bed. The bed was covered to protect the worms from extreme weather conditions.

Figure 3- 10. Collected Earthworms

8. **Cover and Maintaining:** Straw was used as a breathable material to cover the vermicomposting bed to control temperature and moisture retention. Checked the moisture levels frequently and added water as needed. To aerate and quicken the decomposition process, turn the compost periodically. Regular monitoring of moisture levels was conducted, and water was added as required. The composting process was expedited by periodically turning the compost to enhance aeration. The utilization of straw as a breathable material facilitated optimal conditions for temperature control and moisture management. This proactive approach ensured efficient decomposition and overall success in the vermicomposting process. The utilization of straw as a cover not only maintained optimal temperature but also facilitated moisture management through frequent assessments and timely hydration adjustments.

Figure 3- 11. Covering the Bed with Straw

3.2.4 Laboratory Tests of Collected and Prepared Compost

Figure 3- 12. Collected Compost Samples for Laboratory Test

Laboratory tests of various samples are the most essential part of the research work. It involves from collection to sampling for different parameters as per standard methods. Approximately 250 grams of compost were gathered for a lab test after 45 days. The experiment was conducted at the Soil Resource Development Institute (SRDI) in Khamar Bari, Dhaka. Standard lab procedures were followed to achieve the laboratory tests. For every parameter, multiple tests were conducted to minimize errors. The following table represents the list of parameters with their standards manual.

Table 3- 1. The List of Parameters with their Standards Manual

Serial No.	Serial No.	Standard Methods (SM) of Analysis***
01	pH	SM 4500-H* Bxcc
02	Biochemical Oxygen Demand (BOD5)	SM 5210 B
03	Chemical Oxygen Demand (COD)	SM 5220 C
04	Total Solids (TS)	SM 2540 B
05	Total Suspended Solids (TSS)	SM 2540 D
06	Total Volatile Solids (TVS)	SM 2540 E
07	Fixed Solids (FS)	SM 2540 E
08	Sludge Volume Index	SM 2710 D
09	Iron (Fe)	SM 3500-Fe B
10	Nitrate (NO3)	SM 4500 NO3 E
11	Phosphate (PO4)	SM 4500-P E
12	Electrical Conductivity (EC),	SM 2510 B
13	Temperature	SM 2550 B
14	Total Alkalinity (as CaCO3)	SM 2320 B
15	Color	physically**
16	Odor	physically**

17	Total Kjeldahl Nitrogen	
18	Phosphorus	Spectrophotometric moylbdo- vanadate method
19	Potassium	Flame photometric method
20	Sulfur	Turbidimetric method

(***All tests were performed from the source of Standard Methods for the Examination of Water and Wastewater, 20th edition, Clesceri, 1999) (**Color and odor tests have been performed based on practical judgment)

3.3 Summary

This chapter covers the overall methods used in this study, beginning with the fecal sludge (FS) sample collection, the vermicomposting system, and the methods applied to determine the compost parameters.

This study's research design uses a thorough and systematic approach to evaluate the viability, effectiveness, and environmental impact of using earthworms to break down feces in a vermicomposting process. Using a mixed-methods approach, the study collects and analyzes data using quantitative and qualitative methods. This chapter covers the collection of FS and organic solid waste (OSW) in great detail. The sample's storage for the vermicomposting process was then briefly discussed. The relevant formulas and figures are supplied with the procedures as needed.

CHAPTER 4
RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the overall results obtained from the survey, visit to Sakhipur FSTP, and laboratory test. The development of the laboratory test has been discussed here briefly. Furthermore, an attempt has been made to explain the potential benefits or drawbacks of varying parameter values or constituent concentrations when applied to agricultural soil. Additionally, an attempt is made to determine the compost's quality using the parameters and constituent concentration established by the testing rules and regulations.

The idea of vermicomposting with fecal sludge as a sustainable management system based on social acceptability, technical and institutional appropriateness, economic viability, and protection of the environment and natural resources—will finally be briefly discussed. This will allow for the possibility of taking significant future actions to improve the FSM.

4.2 Quality of the Compost

Fecal Sludge (FS) presents several advantages over exclusive reliance on chemical fertilizers, particularly when employed as a soil amendment. The inclusion of organic matter in FS enhances the soil's water retention, fosters structural development, minimizes erosion, and serves as a gradual nutrient source. However, when utilizing FS as a soil conditioner, it is imperative to deliberate on the fate of pathogens and heavy metals, ensuring that potential risks are addressed. Additionally, the societal acceptance of FS is intricately tied to its perceived commercial value. The assurance of valid laboratory results and well-informed decisions is imperative in addressing all aspects of FS application, providing comprehensive evidence for its efficacy and safety. Therefore, a comprehensive approach is essential in harnessing the advantages of FS while mitigating potential drawbacks related to pathogen exposure, heavy metal contamination, and societal acceptance, all underpinned by rigorous scientific analysis and decision-making processes. Ultimately, the success of FS as a soil amendment hinges on a thorough understanding of its impact on soil health, potential environmental implications, and societal reception.

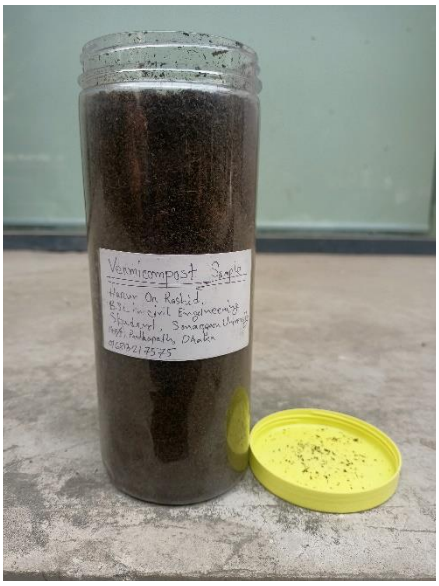

Figure 4- 1. Compost's Sample

Approximately 250 grams of compost was taken from the bed for a lab test after correctly following the composting procedure. The fundamental characteristics of the compost generated from dewatered FS and OSW are shown in Table 4.1.

Table 4- 1. The Fundamental Characteristics of the Compost Generated from Dewatered FS and OSW

Serial no	Characteristics	Result	Standard Range*
01	Color	Dark Gray	Dark gray to black
02	Odor	Absence of foul odor	Absence of foul odor
03	pH	8.32	6.0 –8.5
04	Moisture (%)	27	Maximum 20 %
05	Total Solids (mg/kg)	707796	
06	Total Organic Carbon (%)	14.60	10-25 %
07	Total Organic Nitrogen (%)	2.1	0.5 – 4.0 %
08	C: N	7.35:1	20:1 (maximum)

09	Electrical Conductivity (mS/cm)	8.1	
10	Phosphorus (%)	0.58	0.5-1.5
11	Potassium (%)	1.9	1.0-3.0
12	Lead (ppm)	26	Maximum 30 ppm
13	Nickel (ppm)	8	Maximum 30 ppm
14	Sulfur (%)	0.17	0.1-0.5
15	Total Coliform (cfu/100 ml)	1450	
16	Faecal Coliform (cfu/100 ml)	110	≤1000, WHO guideline 1989

Table 4-1 shows that the observed color, odor, and moisture levels, dependent upon the local climate, OSW constituents, human nature, and other factors, are satisfactory. The compost tasted dry, dark gray in color, and without any unpleasant smells. In addition, physiochemical characteristics, such as pH, were noted to be 8.32, indicating the maturity level end. The pH remained above 8.0 throughout the composting process, showing the material's alkaline nature. Additionally, a high level of electrical conductivity (EC) (8.1 mS/cm) was recorded following the end of the composting period. It must be remembered that a high conductivity may result from sodium chloride dissolving, which is harmful to plants. This is crucial for applying compost in agriculture because high soil salinity can prevent plants from germinating and growing.

The found value of Total Organic Carbon (TOC) was 14.60%, becoming within the standard range of 10–25%. The total organic nitrogen (TON) is 2.1%, between 0.5 and 4.00%. Many authors have used the C/N ratio as one measure of compost maturity. However, because of its wide variation, which depends on the starting materials, it cannot be used as an absolute indicator of compost maturity. The compost's C/N ratio was found to be 7.35:1, which is below the maximum 20:1 ratio set by the Bangladesh

Ministry of Agriculture. Following maturity, the C/N ratio met the earlier established limits and is appropriate for soil addition.

When implementing resource recovery, assessing components that could affect people and the environment is critical. Among them are the existence of heavy metals and infections. The first barrier to using compost is the reduction of pathogens. Faecal Coliform (F.C) is within standard limits as per WHO guidelines. Thus, pathogen transmission from compost to soil is minimized, accomplished during the composting process through high temperatures and length of time.

Heavy metals are a concern due to their toxicity and long-term adverse effects on soils. When humans ingest contaminated agricultural products, heavy metals can have toxic effects on them. For this reason, experiments were conducted on the compost to confirm the presence of heavy metals. After getting results from the Soil Resource Development Institute (SRDI) in Khamar Bari, Dhaka, it is seen that the presence of heavy metals is within tolerable limits. Lead is 26 ppm, and Nickel is 8 ppm, which is in the range of the standard limit of 30 ppm. Other chemical constituents like phosphorus, potassium, and sulfur, which are rich sources of nutrient content in compost, are also within normal limits. The right proportion of nutrients improves the compost's quality. To optimize benefits and avoid environmental contamination due to excessive use of nutrients, it is crucial to determine the proper rate for treating sludge land application. The final result after a 45-day composting period is shown in the following figure. In summary, using FS as a compost or soil conditioner can result in a rich commercial product used at the household level for horticultural purposes.

Figure 4- 2. Before and After Situation of Screening the Compost

Lastly, vermicomposting organic solid waste, such as cow dung and feces, could improve soil fertility while maintaining a clean atmosphere.

4.3 Summary

The composting process was conducted appropriately, resulting in a dry, dark gray compost with no unpleasant smells. The pH remained consistently above 8.0, reaching 8.32 at the end, indicating alkaline nature. Electrical Conductivity (EC) was high at 8.1 mS/cm, potentially due to sodium chloride dissolution, which can be detrimental to plants. Total Organic Carbon (TOC) was 14.60%, falling within the standard range of 10–25%, and Total Organic Nitrogen (TON) was 2.1%, within the scope of 0.5–4.00%. The C/N ratio was 7.35:1, below the maximum 20:1 ratio, meeting maturity criteria. Pathogen reduction during composting was adequate, with fecal coliform within WHO guidelines. Heavy metals (Lead: 26 ppm, Nickel: 8 ppm) were within the standard limit of 30 ppm. Phosphorus, Potassium, and Sulphur levels were within normal limits, providing nutrient-rich compost. The 45-day composting period they have yielded positive results. Vermicomposting of organic waste, including cow dung and feces, is suggested to enhance soil fertility while preserving environmental cleanliness.

CHAPTER 5
CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE WORKS

5.1 Conclusions

To sum up, this thesis has examined the complex vermicomposting process as a cutting-edge and environmentally friendly method of handling feces. The study has provided valuable insights into the effectiveness of vermicomposting in transforming fecal sludge into nutrient-rich organic matter while mitigating environmental concerns associated with improper waste disposal. The findings demonstrate the feasibility of this approach, providing several key benefits:

1. Sludge stabilization and reduction: Vermicomposting significantly reduces the volume and stabilizes the organic matter content of fecal sludge.
2. Nutrient-rich vermicompost: The end product of vermicomposting, vermicompost, is a valuable organic fertilizer rich in essential plant nutrients like nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium. This makes it a valuable resource for agricultural applications, promoting sustainable food production and reducing reliance on chemical fertilizers.
3. Improved sanitation and public health: Vermicomposting offers a safe and hygienic way to manage fecal sludge, minimizing the risk of environmental contamination and disease transmission associated with untreated sludge. This improves public health and sanitation conditions in communities lacking proper wastewater treatment infrastructure.
4. Cost-effective and scalable: Vermicomposting systems require minimal infrastructure and operational costs compared to conventional sludge treatment methods. Additionally, they can be easily scaled up or down to cater to the needs of different communities, making them particularly suitable for resource-limited settings.
5. Community involvement and acceptance: Vermicomposting can promote community involvement in sanitation management, fostering a sense of ownership and responsibility for waste disposal. This can increase the acceptance of sanitation initiatives and contribute to long-term sustainability.

Furthermore, the study has underscored the broader implications of vermicomposting, not only in waste treatment but also in enhancing soil fertility. The resulting organic matter can be a valuable agricultural resource, contributing to sustainable farming practices. By harnessing the transformative power of earthworms, vermicomposting emerges as a versatile tool that addresses waste management challenges and the imperative to improve soil health. As we navigate the complexities of sanitation and environmental sustainability, vermicomposting can revolutionize fecal sludge treatment, promoting a cleaner, healthier, and more sustainable future.

However, it is essential to acknowledge that further research is needed to optimize vermicomposting processes for fecal sludge treatment. This includes investigating the impact of different feedstock mixtures, optimizing worm species selection, and developing efficient post-processing methods for pathogen reduction and odor control.

5.2 Limitations and Recommendations for Future Works

While the present study has demonstrated the promising potential of vermicomposting for fecal sludge treatment, it is essential to acknowledge the limitations and identify areas for further research and development.

5.2.1 Limitations

1. Scale-Up Challenges: The vermicomposting of fecal sludge may face scalability challenges when transitioning from small-scale experiments to more extensive, real-world applications. Factors such as logistics, space requirements, and the need for specialized equipment may pose obstacles.
2. Variable Feedstock Composition: The composition of fecal sludge can vary significantly based on geographic location, population demographics, and other factors. This variability may impact the efficiency and effectiveness of the vermicomposting process and should be considered in broader applications.
3. Worm species selection: The optimal worm species for fecal sludge vermicomposting may differ based on regional availability and environmental conditions. Evaluating different species' performance and suitability for specific contexts is crucial for optimizing the process.
4. Pathogen reduction: While vermicomposting reduces pathogens significantly, complete elimination might not be achieved consistently. Investigating additional processing methods, such as solar drying or thermophilic composting, in combination with vermicomposting for enhanced pathogen reduction is recommended.

5. Odor control: Vermicomposting systems can potentially generate odors, particularly during the handling and processing of the sludge. Research on effective odor control strategies, such as biofilters or covered systems, is necessary to ensure community acceptance and environmental compliance.
6. Nutrient Content Variation: The nutrient content of vermicompost can vary based on the initial composition of fecal sludge and the specific earthworm species used. Understanding and mitigating these variations is essential for consistent and reliable nutrient outcomes.
7. Social and cultural acceptance: Community acceptance is crucial for successfully implementing sanitation technology. Investigating socio-cultural factors and perceptions regarding vermicomposting in different communities is essential for tailoring communication strategies and promoting community engagement.

Despite these challenges, the findings of this study provide compelling evidence for the potential of vermicomposting as a promising and sustainable option for fecal sludge management. By focusing on further research and development, vermicomposting can promote sanitation, public health, and environmental sustainability in communities worldwide.

5.2.2 Recommendations for Future Work

1. Optimization Studies: Conduct further research to optimize critical parameters of the vermicomposting process, such as earthworm species selection, feedstock composition adjustments, and environmental conditions. This will contribute to maximizing efficiency and effectiveness.
2. Scale-Up Investigations: Explore methodologies for successfully scaling up vermicomposting operations for fecal sludge treatment. This includes assessing the feasibility of large-scale vermicomposting systems and addressing associated logistical challenges.
3. Long-Term Monitoring: Implement long-term monitoring studies to evaluate the sustained effectiveness of vermicomposting in pathogen reduction and nutrient enhancement. This will provide valuable insights into the ongoing performance and stability of the treatment process

4. Public Health Impact Assessment: Conduct a comprehensive assessment of the public health impact of vermicomposting-treated fecal sludge when applied to agricultural lands. This should include monitoring soil quality, crop yields, and potential human exposure risks.
5. Technology Integration: Investigate opportunities to integrate vermicomposting with other waste treatment technologies to create hybrid systems that synergistically address the limitations of individual methods, offering more robust and versatile waste management solutions
6. Evaluating diverse worm species: Exploring the suitability of different earthworm species, mainly native varieties adapted to local environmental conditions, for efficient fecal sludge vermicomposting could be beneficial.
7. Developing pathogen reduction protocols: Research on integrating additional disinfection methods, such as solar drying or biochar addition, into the vermicomposting process to achieve consistent pathogen reduction is crucial for the safe reuse of the end product.
8. Capacity building and community engagement: Implementing community-based education and training programs on vermicomposting can foster ownership, address concerns, and promote sustainable operation and maintenance of the systems.

By addressing these limitations and following the recommended future work areas, vermicomposting can evolve into a robust and widely applicable technology for fecal sludge management, contributing significantly to improved sanitation, public health, and environmental sustainability in developing regions.

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