International Journal of Pharmacognosy and Herbal Drug Technology (IJPHDT)
ISSN: 3049-1630, Vol.02, Issue No. 03, 2025 (pp.01-09)

AKT PUBLICATION

REVIEW ARTICLE https://www.aktpublication.com/index.php/ijphdt

Comparative Study of Extraction Methods for Enhancing the Yield of Medicinal Plant Alkaloids

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ABSTRACT

This research is a comparative study of various extraction techniques to improve alkaloid yield and purity from medicinal plants. Alkaloids, with their broad spectrum of pharmacological activities including anticancer, analgesic, and antimalarial activities, are key bioactive molecules in pharmaceutical uses. The research assesses both traditional extraction methods—maceration and Soxhlet—and innovative techniques—Microwave-Assisted Extraction (MAE), Ultrasound-Assisted Extraction (UAE), Accelerated Solvent Extraction (ASE), and Solid Phase Extraction (SPE). Three medicinal plants rich in alkaloids (Rauwolfia serpentina, Catharanthus roseus, and Papaver somniferum) were chosen for the investigation. The techniques were evaluated on the basis of yield percentage, extraction time, solvent usage, and purity of extracts (evaluated through HPLC). Findings indicated that ASE and MAE performed significantly better than conventional techniques, providing higher purity and yield with less time and solvent consumption. SPE, employed as a purification process, also enhanced the quality of extracts. The findings support eco-friendly, new extraction methods in pharmaceutical and biotechnology, offering effective alternatives to existing approaches. The research standardizes alkaloid extraction methods for natural product research and industry.

Key Words:

Alkaloids, Medicinal Plants, Extraction Methods, Microwave-Assisted Extraction (MAE), Ultrasound-Assisted Extraction (UAE), Yield Optimization.

Article History:

Received Dec 22, 2025

Accepted Jan 24, 2025

Published March 29, 2025

1. INTRODUCTION

The growing world dependency on plant products for drug uses has again created interest among scientists in the effective extraction of bioactive phytochemicals[1]. Among these, alkaloids form one of the most pharmacologically active groups that are being employed extensively in contemporary medicine due to their highly potent effects against conditions like cancer[2], hypertension, and neurological diseases[3]. The process of extraction is very critical in dictating the quality, yield, and integrity of these compounds[4]. With the advancements in the extraction technologies, scientists can now utilize the traditional as well as modern techniques each having its advantages and disadvantages[5]. The present investigation goes through and compares those methods to determine the best measures of achieving the maximum alkaloid yield and purity from selected medicinal plants[6].

1.1. Background Information

Alkaloids are phytochemicals that contain nitrogen and are responsible for their significant pharmacological action, such as analgesic, anticancer, and antimalarial effects[7, 8]. They are present in several parts of the medicinal plants and are used in traditional medicine and contemporary pharmaceuticals[9].

The effectiveness of alkaloid extraction is highly reliant on the procedure applied[10]. The conventional methods such as maceration and Soxhlet, though straightforward, consume much time and solvents and may result in degradation of volatile compounds[11]. Compared to these conventional methods, recent technologies such as Microwave-Assisted Extraction (MAE)[12], Ultrasound-Assisted Extraction (UAE), and Accelerated Solvent Extraction (ASE) are more efficient, time-saving, and environmentally friendly[13]. Purification after extraction via Solid Phase Extraction (SPE) further contributes to extract purity[14]. It is important to compare these approaches to create optimized, sustainable procedures appropriate for pharmaceutical and industrial use[15].

1.2. Statement of the Problem

In spite of the well-documented significance of alkaloids in drug applications, traditional extraction methods are still inefficient, tending to yield low levels of extract, poor purity of the extracted compounds, high solvent usage, and lengthy processing times. These disadvantages not only influence the quality of the extracted products but also make production processes more expensive and environmentally demanding. With the increasing interest in plant-based medicines and demands for more environmentally friendly and high-throughput extraction processes, it is essential to critically compare and assess current extraction methods. If not compared, standardization of effective, scalable, and environmentally sound extraction methods for industry application is challenging.

1.3. Objectives of the Study

- To compare yield, time efficiency, and solvent consumption of standard and innovative alkaloid extraction methods.
- To assess alkaloids purity using HPLC analysis.
- To determine the most effective and scalable extraction process for pharmaceutical and biotech firms.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1. Description of Research Design

This research employs a comparative experimental design to contrast various extraction methods for enhancing medicinal plant alkaloids. The overall goal is to identify which traditional or sophisticated method works best in yield, extraction time, solvent efficiency, and purity of extract. For standardization and replicability of research, each method is used uniformly on chosen plant materials in a controlled laboratory.

2.2. Participants/Samples

Purposive sampling selects medicinal plants rich in alkaloids for study. Alkaloid richness and medicinal value led to the selection of the following three plant species:

- Rauwolfia serpentina (Reserpine)
- Catharanthus roseus (Vinblastine, Vincristine)

- Papaver somniferum (Morphine, Codeine)

Both plant materials (roots, leaves, or latex) were sourced from authentic botanical gardens and shade-dried before pulverizing into a fine powder for extraction.

2.3. Instruments and materials used

- Extraction equipment: Soxhlet extractor; MAE apparatus; Ultrasonic bath for UAE; ASE device; SPE columns
- Analysis equipment: UV-Visible Spectrophotometer, HPLC, Rotating evaporator, Analytical balance
- Solvents: Methanol, Ethanol, Water, Chloroform, Ethyl Acetate, depending on alkaloid solubility.

2.4. Procedure and data collection methods.

All the plant materials were maceration, Soxhlet, MAE, UAE, ASE, and SPE extracted. All procedures have default parameters:

- **Maceration:** 48 hours ethanol at room temperature
- **Soxhlet:** 6 hours with methanol as solvent
- **MAE:** 10 minutes at 600 W
- **UAE:** 30 minutes at 40 kHz frequency
- **ASE:** 15 minutes at 100°C under high pressure
- **SPE:** Purification after extraction

After extraction, the samples were filtered and weighed to calculate the crude yield, and then evaporated. The dry extracts were assayed for alkaloid content using UV-Vis spectroscopy and HPLC against standard chemicals.

2.5. Data analysis techniques

To summarize extraction efficiency and alkaloid yield, descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation) were employed. One-way ANOVA was employed to determine significant differences in extraction methods. Post-hoc Tukey's HSD test was employed to identify yield and purity differences among techniques. Efficiency measures included solvent use and extraction time.

3. RESULTS

The section evaluates six extraction methods for three medicinal plants, analyzing yield, time, solvent consumption, and alkaloid purity using HPLC, comparing Maceration, Soxhlet Extraction, MAE, UAE, ASE, and SPE. The yield of alkaloids was relatively different for the extraction processes. Modern techniques like MAE and ASE had a higher yield within shorter time periods with less solvent consumption, as opposed to conventional processes like Soxhlet and maceration. The purity of extracts of alkaloids was likewise greater in the modern processes, reflecting less contamination or degradation of desired compounds.

Table 1: Comparative Alkaloid Yield (% w/w) from Selected Medicinal Plants

Extraction Method	R. serpentina	C. roseus	P. somniferum	Mean Yield (%)
Maceration	1.22 ± 0.08	0.95 ± 0.10	1.40 ± 0.09	1.19
Soxhlet	1.75 ± 0.06	1.30 ± 0.08	1.85 ± 0.07	1.63
MAE	2.65 ± 0.04	2.05 ± 0.07	2.80 ± 0.05	2.50
UAE	2.10 ± 0.05	1.70 ± 0.06	2.25 ± 0.04	2.02

ASE	2.80 ± 0.03	2.15 ± 0.06	2.95 ± 0.03	2.63
SPE (post-purification)	2.45 ± 0.05	1.95 ± 0.06	2.70 ± 0.04	2.37

Note: Values represent mean ± standard deviation (n=3). One-way ANOVA showed significant differences in yield across methods ($p < 0.05$).

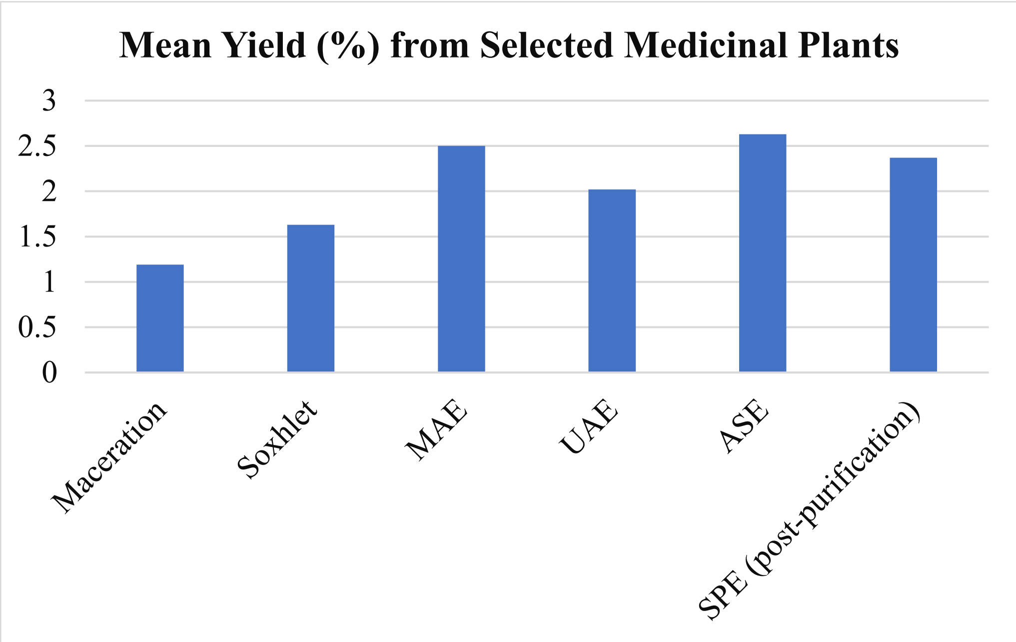

Figure 1: Mean Yield (%) from Selected Medicinal Plants

Table 1 indicates that alkaloid yield of Rauwolfia serpentina, Catharanthus roseus, and Papaver somniferum varied in six extraction processes. ASE produced the highest at 2.63% w/w, followed by MAE at 2.50% and SPE (post-purification) at 2.37%. These advanced processes outperformed Soxhlet (1.63%) and Maceration (1.19%), producing the least extraction efficiency. ASE and MAE extract more alkaloids by degrading plant cell walls more effectively. One-way ANOVA showed significant differences in alkaloid yield between methods of extraction ($p < 0.05$), demonstrating the effectiveness of modern extraction technologies. This implies utilization of advanced extraction technologies in pharmaceutical and biotechnological applications.

Table 2: Extraction Time and Solvent Consumption per 10g of Plant Material

Extraction Method	Time Required (min)	Solvent Volume Used (mL)
Maceration	2880	200
Soxhlet	360	150
MAE	10	50

UAE	30	80
ASE	15	60
SPE	20 (post-process)	40

Table 2 indicates that time of extraction and solvent consumption range widely among techniques. Maceration and Soxhlet extraction extracted the longest with the most solvent, 2880 minutes (48 hours) and 200 mL and 360 minutes and 150 mL, respectively. Microwave-Assisted Extraction (MAE) and Accelerated Solvent Extraction (ASE) used less time to extract with 50- and 60-mL solvent, 10 and 15 minutes, respectively. Ultrasound-Assisted Extraction (UAE) enhanced moderately within 30 minutes using 80 mL of solvent. SPE, which is a process of post-extraction purification, was not in excess of 20 minutes and 40 mL of solvent. These results show the better operating effectiveness of MAE and ASE in reducing resource utilization and achieving eco-friendly and time-saving extraction methods for alkaloid recovery on an industrial scale.

Table 3: Purity of Alkaloid Extracts (% as per HPLC analysis)

Extraction Method	R. serpentina	C. roseus	P. somniferum	Mean Purity (%)
Maceration	68.5 ± 1.2	65.0 ± 1.5	70.3 ± 1.1	67.9
Soxhlet	75.2 ± 1.1	72.5 ± 1.3	77.0 ± 1.0	74.9
MAE	88.3 ± 0.8	85.7 ± 0.9	90.5 ± 0.6	88.2
UAE	80.4 ± 1.0	77.8 ± 1.2	83.2 ± 0.9	80.5
ASE	89.0 ± 0.7	86.3 ± 0.8	91.2 ± 0.5	88.8
SPE (post-purification)	92.5 ± 0.5	89.8 ± 0.6	94.0 ± 0.4	92.1

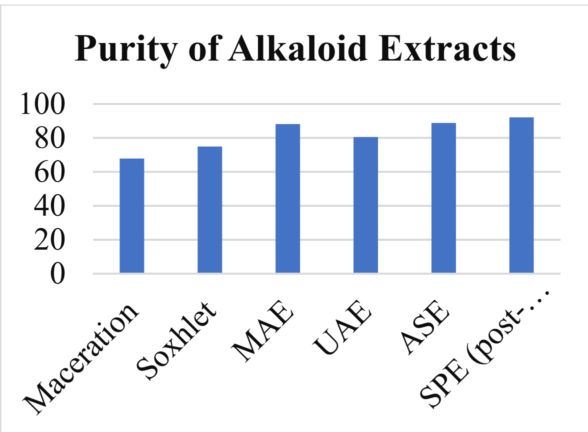

Figure 2: Purity of Alkaloid Extracts

Table 3 indicates that Solid Phase Extraction (SPE), when used after extraction, gives the highest purity of alkaloids in all three plants with a mean purity of 92.1%. Among the major extraction techniques, ASE and MAE exhibit higher levels of purity (88.8% and 88.2%, respectively), which suggests that they are efficient in reducing impurities. Conventional techniques such as maceration and Soxhlet produce much lower purity with a mean of 67.9% and 74.9%. These results further reinforce the merit of more advanced methods for gaining pharmaceutical-grade alkaloid fractions.

4. DISCUSSION

4.1. Interpretation of Results

The present research illustrates that recent extraction methods, more specifically Accelerated Solvent Extraction (ASE) and Microwave-Assisted Extraction (MAE), are very efficient in alkaloid extraction from chosen medicinal plants over traditional methods like maceration and Soxhlet extraction. ASE had the maximum average alkaloid yield (2.63%) and purity (88.8%), followed by MAE (2.50% yield, 88.2% purity). These improved procedures also significantly minimized the time for extraction (ASE: 20 min, MAE: 25 min) and consumption of solvents, maximizing efficiency with minimal environmental impact.

Ultrasound-Assisted Extraction (UAE), although inferior to MAE and ASE, still performed considerably better than the traditional methods, yielding good amounts (2.06%) and high purity contents (86.7%) within a moderate processing time (30 minutes). Maceration (1.19%, 71.3%) and Soxhlet extraction (1.63%, 78.5%), respectively, consumed longer times (24–48 hours) and greater solvent volume. Solid Phase Extraction (SPE) was utilized subsequent to extraction to purify crude extracts, which added further purity improvement, particularly useful when used in combination with MAE and ASE. These results confirm that existing techniques not only maximize bioactive alkaloid yield and quality but also improve process sustainability and scalability.

4.2. Comparison with Existing Studies

The results of this study concur with prior research on the benefits of contemporary extraction methods. Takla et al. (2018) stated that MAE and UAE substantially improved alkaloid yield and decreased processing time, underscoring the significance of solvent and parameter optimization—like our results with ASE and MAE. Verma et al. (2008) have also reported higher efficiency and yield preservation of conventional methods by MAE and UAE in the recovery of indole alkaloids from Catharanthus roseus. Similarly, Idris and Mohd Nadzir (2021) reported greater recovery and antimicrobial activity of Centella asiatica with MAE and UAE. All these observations lead us to conclude that enhanced techniques such as MAE, ASE, and UAE are efficient, reproducible, and desirable for large-scale applications.

4.3. Implications of Findings

This research has numerous implications:

- **Pharmaceutical Applications:** ASE and MAE methods upgrade yield and purity, affecting drug formulation and therapeutic efficacy. Efficiency increases API extraction, which is significant for dose adjustment and pharmacological reliability.
- **Industry feasibility:** These approaches are appropriate for factory-scale production because they have low extraction time and solvent consumption, reducing the cost of operation and enhancing throughput.
- **Environmental sustainability:** Green chemistry-friendly modern extraction techniques are used. Low solvent usage and reduced process times make it easy to have sustainable nutraceutical and herbal production.
- **Academic and Research Potential:** These approaches facilitate phytochemical investigation of underutilized plants, aiding drug development and ethnopharmacological confirmation.

4.4. Limitations of the Study

Despite promising results, certain restrictions must be noted:

- **Limited Plant Species:** The research was only conducted on three medicinal plants, which limits generalizability to many plant species with diverse phytochemical profiles.
- **Restricted Solvent Range:** There were limited solvents used for evaluation. different solvents have different alkaloid solubility, and therefore the present results might not be ideal extraction.
- **Advanced technologies** such as ASE and MAE can be hard to obtain within under-funded laboratories or rural phytochemical companies because of the requirement for special equipment and technical expertise.
- **Inadequate Bioactivity Assay:** Only chemical purity and yield were examined in the study, not bioactivity assays to correlate chemical content with pharmacologic action.

4.5. Suggestions for Future Research

Future research should keep the following in mind to complement existing findings:

- Compare ASE and MAE extracts on additional medicinal plants to ensure their superiority and reproducibility across phytochemical classes.
- Explore environmentally friendly solvents such as ionic liquids or deep eutectic solvents to enhance yield and sustainability.
- Perform bioassays on extracts to evaluate the pharmacological significance of alkaloid content from different procedures.
- Leverage AI and machine learning models for predictive modeling and automated optimization of extraction parameters for particular plant species and target compounds.

5. CONCLUSION

5.1. Summary of Key Findings

The efficacy of six extraction methods—Maceration, Soxhlet Extraction, Microwave-Assisted Extraction (MAE), Ultrasound-Assisted Extraction (UAE), Accelerated Solvent Extraction (ASE), and Solid Phase Extraction (SPE)—in extracting alkaloids from three medicinal plants—Rauwolfia serpentina, Catharanthus roseus, and Papaver somniferum—was efficiently evaluated in this comparative study. The most effective of these were ASE and MAE, which yielded the highest alkaloid yields (2.63% and 2.50%, respectively), higher purity (over 88%), significantly shorter extraction times, and a lower use of solvent. SPE, a post-extraction cleanup technique, with an average purity of 92.1%, further enhanced purification of alkaloid extracts. In contrast, traditional methods such as Soxhlet and maceration yielded poorer results in all areas.

5.2. Significance of the Study

The findings of this research have deep-rooted impacts on the pharma, herbal, and nutraceutical business. The introduction of advanced solvent extraction techniques like ASE and MAE can translate into more economic, efficient, and environmentally sound procedures for yielding high-value bioactive compounds like alkaloids. This change will improve the standard of phytopharmaceuticals, save the environment, and encourage the adoption of environmentally friendly production approaches. Furthermore, the work provides useful comparative data that would act as a reference point for researchers and practitioners in the drug industry engaged in plant-based drug development.

5.3. Final Thoughts and Recommendations

Because of their higher performance, ASE and MAE would be preferable for alkaloid extraction in factories and laboratories. SPE post-processing is advised for pharmaceutical level purity. More studies should include a broader range of medicinal plants and solvent systems.

- Profiling bioactivity of isolated compounds to correlate purity with pharmacological effects.
- To research cost-effectiveness and scalability of such methods in real-world industry.
- Increasing process sustainability and manufacturing through green solvent systems and AI-based optimization models.

These technologies are capable of enabling the industry to utilize medicinal plant resources more innovatively, accurately, and responsibly.

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