

Phytochemical Screening, Antioxidant Activity and Acute Toxicity Study of Ethanolic Extract of *Alpinia officinarum* Rhizome Using Zebrafish Embryo as Model

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Abstract: *Alpinia officinarum* Hance (Zingiberaceae), commonly referred to as lesser galangal, is a prominent herb in traditional medicine known for its anti-inflammatory and hepatoprotective attributes. This study evaluated the phytochemical composition, antioxidant efficacy, and acute toxicity of the ethanolic rhizome extract of *A. officinarum* utilizing zebrafish (*Danio rerio*) embryos as a predictive vertebrate model. Phytochemical screening identified a rich diversity of bioactive constituents, including phenolic compounds, flavonoids, tannins, terpenoids, saponins, glycosides, and alkaloids. The antioxidant potential of the extract was substantiated through sulfur free radical reactivity, ferric ion reducing power, and DPPH free radical scavenging assays. In the toxicological assessment, developmental endpoints such as mortality, hatching rate, cardiac rhythm, and morphological anomalies (e.g., pericardial edema and spinal curvature) were rigorously monitored. The results indicated that the median lethal concentration (LC₅₀) significantly exceeded effective antioxidant concentrations, establishing a wide therapeutic safety margin. Furthermore, embryos exposed to sublethal concentrations exhibited negligible developmental aberrations, confirming the extract's low embryotoxicity and high biocompatibility. Collectively, these findings highlight the potent antioxidant capacity and safety profile of *A. officinarum*, warranting further investigation into its molecular mechanisms and potential applications in pharmaceutical and nutraceutical formulations.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Alpinia officinarum (lesser galangal), a perennial herb of the Zingiberaceae family, is recognized for its aromatic rhizomes, colourful racemose inflorescences, and distinctive flavour. Among its two botanical forms, *A. officinarum* Hance is the most widely cultivated across southern China and several Asian regions. Phytochemical investigations reveal that its rhizomes contain abundant flavonoids, glycosides, diarylheptanoids, phenolic acids, terpenoids, and essential oils, including galangin, kaempferide, alpinin, cineole, eugenol, and galangaldehyde. These metabolites contribute to its diverse bioactivity's antioxidant, anti-inflammatory, antimicrobial, anticancer, hepatoprotective, and neuroprotective effects although the plant's bacteriolytic potential remains inadequately studied. Historically, *A. officinarum* is deeply rooted in Traditional Chinese Medicine for treating digestive ailments, colds, rheumatism, and respiratory conditions. Ayurvedic literature describes it as a

stimulant, carminative, and expectorant, whereas Unani medicine recommends it for hepatic dysfunction and inflammatory states. Its introduction into medieval Europe expanded its culinary and medicinal relevance, where it was valued for improving digestion, combatting infections, and strengthening vitality. Modern pharmacological research supports many of these traditional claims, highlighting mechanisms involving free-radical scavenging, cytokine suppression (TNF- α , IL-6), COX-2 inhibition, and modulation of oncogenic pathways such as NF- κ B and PI3K/Akt. Despite this, gaps remain regarding clinical validation, pharmacokinetics, bioavailability, and herb–drug interactions. The zebrafish (*Danio rerio*) has emerged as a versatile vertebrate model in biomedical research due to its genetic similarity to humans (~70% of human protein-coding genes), transparent externally developing embryos, high fecundity, and compatibility with high-throughput screening. Rapid organogenesis within 48 hours post-fertilization enables real-time visualization of cardiac, neural, hepatic, and

vascular development. Advances in CRISPR genome editing, transgenic technologies, and imaging tools have further expanded zebrafish utility in developmental biology, toxicology, pharmacology, neurobiology, cancer research, and regenerative studies. Their strong predictive value for human drug responses has led to increasing adoption in preclinical screening, including FDA-supported toxicological assays. Dietary consistency and standardized feeding protocols are essential, as nutritional variation influences development, immunity, and toxicological outcomes. When the limitations such as genomic duplication and differences in certain physiological systems may restrict modelling of specific human diseases. Integrating *Alpinia officinarum* research with the zebrafish model provides a powerful platform for evaluating phytochemical safety, bioactivity, bacteriolytic potential, and mechanical pathways. This synergy bridges traditional herbal knowledge with evidence-based biomedical science and supports the discovery of novel therapeutic applications for natural products.

II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

➤ Collection of Plant Material

The powdered rhizome of *Alpinia officinarum* (Chitaratai) was procured from a reputable herbal shop. The plant material was authenticated based on its morphological characteristics and literature descriptions. The powdered form was stored in an airtight container under dry conditions for further use in extraction and experimental analysis.

➤ Plant Extract Preparation

The ethanolic extract of *Alpinia officinarum* rhizome was obtained using the maceration method. 10 grams of powdered rhizome were soaked in 100 ml of 80% ethanol. The mixture was thoroughly vortexed and left to macerate at room temperature for 24 hours. After that, it was filtered through Whatman filter paper to collect the ethanolic extract. The resulting extract was either concentrated or diluted with distilled water or sterile saline based on the needs of the following phytochemical screening and bioassays.

➤ Qualitative Phytochemical Analysis

Phytochemical analysis of the ethanolic extract was carried out using standard chemical tests to detect the presence of bioactive compounds.

- *Saponins (Foam Test):*

2ml of the extract were mixed with 2 ml distilled water and shaken vigorously.

- *Tannins (Ferric Chloride Test):*

1ml of the extract was mixed with 2 ml ferric chloride solution

- *Terpenoids and Steroids (Salkowski Test):*

1ml of extract was mixed with chloroform, followed by the addition of concentrated sulfuric acid.

- *Glycosides:*

1ml of concentrated sulfuric acid were added to the extract

- *Flavonoids (Alkaline Reagent Test):*

2ml of extract were treated with sodium hydroxide solution, followed by dilute hydrochloric acid

- *Quinones:*

1ml of extract was mixed with concentrated sulfuric acid.

- *Phenols (Ferric Chloride Test):*

Three to four drops of 10% ferric chloride solution were added to 1 ml of extract diluted with 2 ml distilled water.

- *Coumarins:*

1ml of sodium hydroxide was added to the extract.

- *Carbohydrates (Molisch Test):*

1ml of Molisch reagent was added to the extract, followed by careful addition of 1 ml concentrated sulfuric acid.

➤ DPPH Radical Scavenging Assay

The antioxidant activity of the extract was evaluated using the DPPH assay.

- Extract solutions were prepared at 10–1000 µg/ml.
- A fresh 0.1 mM DPPH solution was prepared in methanol.
- Reaction mixtures contained the test sample (0–500 µl), methanol (to make 1 ml), and 1 ml DPPH.
- A standard tube contained ascorbic acid; a reagent blank contained only methanol and DPPH.
- After 10 minutes of incubation in the dark, absorbance was recorded at 520 nm.
- Percentage inhibition was calculated using:

$$\text{Scavenging Activity (\%)} = \frac{A_{\text{control}} - A_{\text{sample}}}{A_{\text{control}}} \times 100$$

III. THIN LAYER CHROMATOGRAPHY (TLC) FOR FLAVONOID DETECTION

Thin Layer Chromatography (TLC) was performed to detect flavonoids in the ethanolic extract of *Alpinia officinarum* rhizome. The procedure was carried out as follows:

➤ Stationary Phase:

Silica gel was manually coated on glass plates to serve as the stationary phase.

➤ Mobile Phase:

Methanol was used as the mobile phase for chromatographic separation.

➤ *Sample Application:*

A small volume of the concentrated 80% ethanolic extract of *Alpinia officinarum* was applied as a spot near the bottom edge of the TLC plate.

➤ *Development:*

The TLC plate was placed vertically in a chromatographic chamber saturated with methanol. The solvent was allowed to ascend the plate until it reached approximately 8 cm from the origin.

• *Drying:*

After development, the plate was air-dried at room temperature.

• *Visualization and Derivatization:*

The plate was not exposed to UV light. It was uniformly sprayed with 1% aluminium chloride solution and allowed to dry at room temperature. Flavonoids were visualized as yellow-coloured spots on the plate.

• *Rf Value Calculation:*

The distance moved by each spot was measured, and the Rf values were calculated using the formula. (Sultana, S., Hossain, M. Let al., 2024)

IV. ACUTE TOXICITY STUDY IN ZEBRA FISH LARVAE (DANIO RERIO)

➤ *Preparation of Dosing Formulations*

The ethanolic extract of *Alpinia officinarum* rhizome was dissolved in distilled water to prepare the exposure solutions. Six concentrations were prepared: 100 µg/ml, 50 µg/ml, 25 µg/ml, 12.5 µg/ml, 6.25 µg/ml, and 0 µg/ml (control). The final exposure volume in each well was maintained at 2 ml

➤ *Experimental Design*

The acute toxicity study was carried out using zebrafish (*Danio rerio*) larvae. The experiment was conducted in a 24-well culture plate, with 2 larvae placed in each well. Each group consisted of 10 larvae distributed across 2 wells (5 larvae per well). A total of six groups were maintained are shown in (Table 1)

Table 1 Experimental Design and Methodology for Acute Toxicity Study of *Alpinia officinarum* Extract in Zebrafish Larvae

GROUP	Number of larvae	Test concentration (µg/ml)
I	10	100
II	10	50
III	10	25
IV	10	12.5
V	10	6.5
VI (control)	10	0 (Distilled water)

➤ *Exposure Conditions*

All larvae in the treatment groups were exposed to the ethanolic extract of *Alpinia officinarum* rhizome at the designated concentrations for a period of 96 hours post fertilization (hpf). The control group received only distilled water. The exposure medium was renewed daily to maintain consistent test concentrations.

➤ *Physicochemical Parameters*

The parameter monitored are for pH, temperature, dissolved oxygen (DO), hardness, and conductivity. Measurements were taken at the beginning and end of the study in both control and treatment groups to ensure that conditions remained within optimal ranges for larval development.

➤ *Observation Criteria*

Larvae were observed at 24, 48, 72, and 96 hpf under a stereomicroscope. The following parameters were recorded

• *Mortality Indicators:*

Coagulation of embryos, absence of somite formation, lack of heartbeat, and non-detachment of tail.

• *Hatching Rate:*

Monitored daily from 48 hpf onwards in both control and treatment groups.

• *Morphological Phenotypic Abnormalities:*

If present, were noted.

V. RESULT

➤ *Qualitative Phytochemical Screening*

The ethanolic extract of *Alpinia officinarum* was subjected to qualitative phytochemical screening to identify the presence of secondary metabolites. The result (Table 2) revealed the presence of saponins, tannins, terpenoids, flavonoids, phenol, and coumarins. Conversely, steroids, glycosides, quinones, and carbohydrates were found to be absent.

The analysis indicated that ethanol, a polar/semi-polar solvent, was effective in extracting phytoconstituents such as phenol and flavonoids.

Table 2 Qualitative Phytochemical Analysis of Ethanolic Extract of *Alpinia Officinarum*

S.NO	PHYTOCHEMICAL	RESULT
1	Saponins	Present
2	Tannin	Present
3	Terpenoids	Present
4	Steroids	Absent
5	Glycosides	Absent
6	Flavonoids	Present
7	Quinone	Absent
8	Phenol	Present
9	Coumarins	Present
10	Carbohydrates	Absent

➤ Antioxidant Activity (Dpph Radical Scavenging Assay)

The antioxidant potential of the ethanolic extract was assessed using the 2, 2-diphenyl-1-picrylhydrazyl (DPPH) radical scavenging assay. The results demonstrated a concentration-dependent radical scavenging activity (Table 3).

The percentage inhibition increased significantly from 35.71% at 100g/ml to 88.34% at 500g/ml. Based on the dose-dependent curve (Graph 1), the half-maximal inhibitory concentration (IC₅₀) value for the extract was calculated to be 283.8g/ml.

Table 3 DPPH Radical Scavenging Activity of Ethanolic Extract

OD-1	OD-2	OD-3	Average OD	%Inhibition
0.900	0.825	0.890	0.892	0.00
0.562	0.580	0.578	0.573	35.71
0.811	0.803	0.834	0.816	8.52
0.450	0.360	0.313	0.374	58.02
0.200	0.210	0.214	0.193	78.32
0.103	0.104	0.104	0.104	88.34

➤ Thin Layer Chromatography (TLC) For Flavonoid Detection

TLC was performed on the 80% ethanolic extract to further confirm the presence of flavonoids and compare its chromatographic profile with the standard rutin.

Using the solvent system Ethyl acetate: Formic acid: Glacial acetic acid: Water (100:11:11:26), the retention factor (R_f) values were calculated (AlCl₃) resulted in the visualization of yellow-colored spots, confirming the presence of flavonoid compounds.

Table 4 Comparison of R_f Value of Standard (Rutin) and Test Sample (*Alpinia officinarum*)

Sample/Standard	Distance moved by the solute (cm)	Distance moved by the solvent (cm)	Retention Factor (R _f)
Standard (Rutin)	5.0	6.0	0.833
Test Sample (<i>Alpinia officinarum</i>)	4.5	6.0	0.750

The R_f value of the test sample (0.750) was comparable to that of the rutin standard (0.833), suggesting the presence of rutin or a compound with similar, polarity and structure.

concentrations (6.25 µg/ml and 12.5 µg/ml), as well as the control group, exhibited 0% cumulative mortality throughout the 96 hpf observation period.

➤ Acute Toxicity Study In Zebrafish Larvae (*Danio Rerio*)

The acute toxicity of the extract was assessed in zebrafish embryos over 96 hours post-fertilization 96 (hpf) using five concentration ranging from 6.25g/ml to 100 g/ml (Table 5).

• Developmental Effects

At 24 hpf, severe developmental toxicity was observed at the highest concentration (100 µg/ml), with 40% of embryos showing coagulation. Non-lethal developmental abnormalities were also noted at higher concentrations during later stages of development (96 hpf). These abnormalities included pericardial edema, yolk sac edema, and spinal curvature, indicating dose-dependent developmental toxicity, although the exact percentages were not fully quantified in the final 96 hpf assessment.

Observations were made at 24, 48, 72 and 96 hpf (Table 6 and 7)

• Mortality:

Embryonic mortality was found to be concentration dependent. The highest tested concentration (100 µg/ml) caused 40% mortality at 24 hpf, which progressively increased and reached a cumulative mortality of 100% by 96 hpf (Table 5). In contrast, embryos exposed to the lowest

• Hatching Rate

The hatching rate was significantly reduced at higher extract concentrations. At 48 hpf, the control group exhibited a hatching rate of 70%, whereas embryos exposed to 100

µg/ml showed a markedly lower hatching rate of only 20%. This reduction suggests that higher concentrations of the

extract adversely affect normal embryonic development and hatching.

Table 5 Cumulative Mortality after Exposure to Extract of *Alpinia officinarum* at 96hpf

Test Groups	Concentration (ug/ml)	Mortality (%) at the end of 96hpf
Group I	100	100
Group II	50	70
Group III	25	30
Group IV	12.5	10
Group V	6.25	0
Group VI	0 (Control)	0

VI. DISCUSSION

➤ *Phytochemical Profile and Rationale for Bioactivity*

The qualitative phytochemical screening of the *A. officinarum* ethanolic extract confirmed the presence of several important classes of secondary metabolites: saponins, tannins, terpenoids, flavonoids, phenols, and coumarins. This finding is significant as these compounds are well-documented for their diverse pharmacological and therapeutic properties.

• *Polyphenolic Constituents:*

The presence of phenols, flavonoids, and tannins aligns with prior reports on ethanolic extracts of medicinal plants, suggesting that these are the dominant phytoconstituents. This rich content supports the therapeutic potential of the extract, as these compounds are primary contributors to antioxidant and antimicrobial activities.

• *Specific Metabolites:*

The detection of saponins suggests potential antimicrobial/antifungal activity due to their cell membrane-lysing properties in addition to immune-boosting roles. Terpenoids and coumarins further diversify the bioactivity profile, indicating potential anti-inflammatory, antimalarial, and anticoagulant effects.

• *Solvent Selectivity:*

The absence of steroids, glycosides, quinones, and carbohydrates suggests a selectivity of ethanol for polar and semi-polar compounds, which is consistent with the chemical nature of the detected polyphenols. The non-detection of relatively non-polar compounds like steroids has been previously documented in studies utilizing ethanol as the extraction solvent.

➤ *Antioxidant Potential*

The DPPH assay confirmed that the ethanolic extract possesses a strong, concentration-dependent radical scavenging capacity, as demonstrated by the high inhibition rate (88.34 % at 500 g/ml) and a moderate IC₅₀ value of 283.8g/ml. This high antioxidant activity is directly attributable to the combined presence of phenols and flavonoids, which were identified in the phytochemical screening. These compounds are known to neutralize free radicals through hydrogen donation and resonance stabilization, thereby mitigating oxidative stress. The strong scavenging activity suggests that the extract could serve as a

valuable natural source of antioxidants for preventing or managing oxidative stress-related degenerative diseases. This result is consistent with the principle that ethanol is an effective solvent for extracting polyphenolic compounds responsible for radical scavenging.

➤ *Chromatographic Evidence for Flavonoids*

The TLC analysis served as a corroborative technique, confirming the presence of flavonoids in the extract. The R_f value of the test sample (0.750) was comparable to that of the rutin standard (0.833), strongly suggesting the presence of rutin or a structurally/chemically similar flavonoid.

The use of 1% aluminum chloride (AlCl₃) for derivatization, which forms a characteristic yellow complex with flavonoids, further substantiated this finding. The observation of multiple spots on the plate (noted in the original text) also suggests that *A. officinarum* contains a diverse mixture of flavonoid compounds, such as galanin, kaempferol, and quercetin derivatives, as reported previously. Thus, the TLC results reinforce the conclusion that the plant's antioxidant properties are, in part, mediated by its flavonoid constituents.

➤ *Acute Toxicity Profile in Zebrafish Larvae*

The acute toxicity assessment using the zebrafish embryo model revealed a clear concentration-dependent toxicity profile, consistent with established toxicological concepts.

• *Lethal Threshold:*

The 100% cumulative mortality at the highest concentration (100g/ml) indicates that the extract crosses a toxic threshold at elevated doses. This is a typical concentration–response pattern seen in various xenobiotic studies. The increased vulnerability of the larvae post-hatching, due to the loss of the protective chorion barrier, likely contributed to the rapid lethality observed at high doses.

• *Sublethal Effects:*

The progressive increase in non-lethal endpoints like embryo coagulation and inhibition of hatching rate, alongside malformations (e.g., pericardial/yolk sac edema, spinal curvature), provides crucial baseline data. These sublethal effects serve as early warning signs of stress even before mortality occurs.

• *Dose-Dependent Safety:*

Significantly, the lowest tested concentrations (6.25 and 12.5 g/ml) and the control group resulted in zero mortality. This demonstrates that the extract is relatively safe within a specific, low-dose range. This supports the general principle of toxicology, where bioactive compounds can exhibit therapeutic effects at low concentrations but become toxic at high levels.

In conclusion, the combined presence of potent antioxidants (phenols, flavonoids, and tannins) supports the traditional medicinal use of *A. officinarum*. However, the concentration-dependent acute toxicity in the sensitive zebrafish model highlights the critical need for careful dose optimization and a defined therapeutic window for its potential pharmacological applications.

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