



Review

Genetic modification: A tool for enhancing beta-glucosidase production for biofuel application



Reeta Rani Singhania^a, Anil Kumar Patel^{b,*}, Ashok Pandey^c, Edgard Ganansour^d

^a DBT-IOC Advanced Bio-Energy Research Centre, Indian Oil Corporation; R&D Centre, Sector-13, Faridabad 121007, India

^b Department of Molecular Biosciences and Bioengineering, University of Hawaii at Manoa, Honolulu 96822, HI, United States

^c Center of Innovative and Applied Bioprocessing, Sector 81, Knowledge City PO Manauli, SAS Nagar, Mohali 140306, Punjab, India

^d Bioenergy and Energy Planning Research Group, École Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne, CH-1015 Lausanne, Switzerland

HIGHLIGHTS

- Beta glucosidase is the rate limiting enzyme in cellulase complex.
- Fungal cellulases are usually deficient of optimum BGL.
- Genetic modification is capable of producing high titers of BGL with desired properties.
- GT BGL is highly desired for high density glucose conversion from cellulose.

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ABSTRACT

Beta-glucosidase (BGL) is rate limiting enzyme for cellulose hydrolysis as it acts in the final step of lignocellulosic biomass conversion to convert cellobiose into glucose, the final end product. Most of the fungal strains for cellulase production are deficient in BGL hence BGL is supplemented into cellulases to have efficient biomass conversion. Genetic engineering has enabled strain modification to produce BGL optimally with desired properties to be employed for biofuel applications. It has been cloned either directly into BGL lacking or into another expression system, to be overexpressed so as to be blended into BGL deficient cellulases. In this article, role of genetic engineering to overcome BGL limitations in cellulase cocktail and its significance for biofuel applications has been critically reviewed.

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* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: anilkpatel22@gmail.com, patelani@hawaii.edu (A.K. Patel).

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1. Introduction

Lignocellulosic biomass is the most abundant and ubiquitous material available to be utilized for the benefits of mankind. It is mainly composed of cellulose, lignin and hemicelluloses and the amount varies from 30–50%, 20–30% and 20–40% respectively. Cellulose is the major component and is a linear polymer of glucose linked by β -1,4 linkage. It is acted upon by cellulases which consist of three major components viz. endoglucanases (EC 3.2.1.4), exoglucanases (EC 3.2.1.91) and β -glucosidase (EC 3.2.1.21) (Singhania et al., 2013; Mohanram et al., 2013). These enzymes act in perfect synergism and tight regulation under natural conditions and convert the cellulose polymer into its monomers (Singhania et al., 2010). Fig. 1 shows all the components of cellulase acting together to hydrolyze crystalline cellulose. Endoglucanases act randomly along the chain length, thereby producing new sites to be attacked by exoglucanases (cellobiohydrolases). LPMOs are non-hydrolytic proteins, which help cellulase components to access cellulose fibers by producing nicks in between the chain. Exoglucanases hydrolyse cellulose polymers at the terminal reducing or non-reducing ends, producing mainly cellobioses along with small oligosaccharides. The liberated cellobioses are acted by β -glucosidases (BGL), which convert into glucose. Thus BGL is the rate-limiting enzyme in cellulose con-

version (Singhania et al., 2013) and determines the rate of forward reactions. Cellobiose accumulation inhibits the exoglucanase activity and reducing the overall saccharification rate, therefore, its conversion into glucose via BGL is necessary. Moreover accumulated glucose reversibly inhibits the BGL activity and thus the regulatory mechanism for BGL is quite tedious. The BGL is most important in biomass hydrolysis, as most of the microorganisms producing cellulases are BGL deficient, but there are some other components also produced which could improve cellulase efficiency significantly such as xylanase. About 40% of biomass is hemicellulose, which acts as a physical barrier and limits the accessibility of the cellulases to cellulose (Vandeweyer and Dahman, 2011). Blending of hemicellulases with cellulases in the enzymatic cocktails shows synergistic effect in cellulase activities and increases overall saccharification efficiency (Hu et al., 2011).

Lignin is another component in the biomass, which is the most resistant to digestion and is responsible for protection of biomass from microbial attacks. It restricts cellulase to access cellulose fibers. Lignin degradation could be also possible by enzymes like ligninase but these enzymes are quite slow and hence pretreatment of biomass is required to remove lignin and to make cellulose amenable to be acted on by cellulases. It has been rightly considered as one of the biggest barrier for economic bioconversion of biomass (Saini et al., 2016).

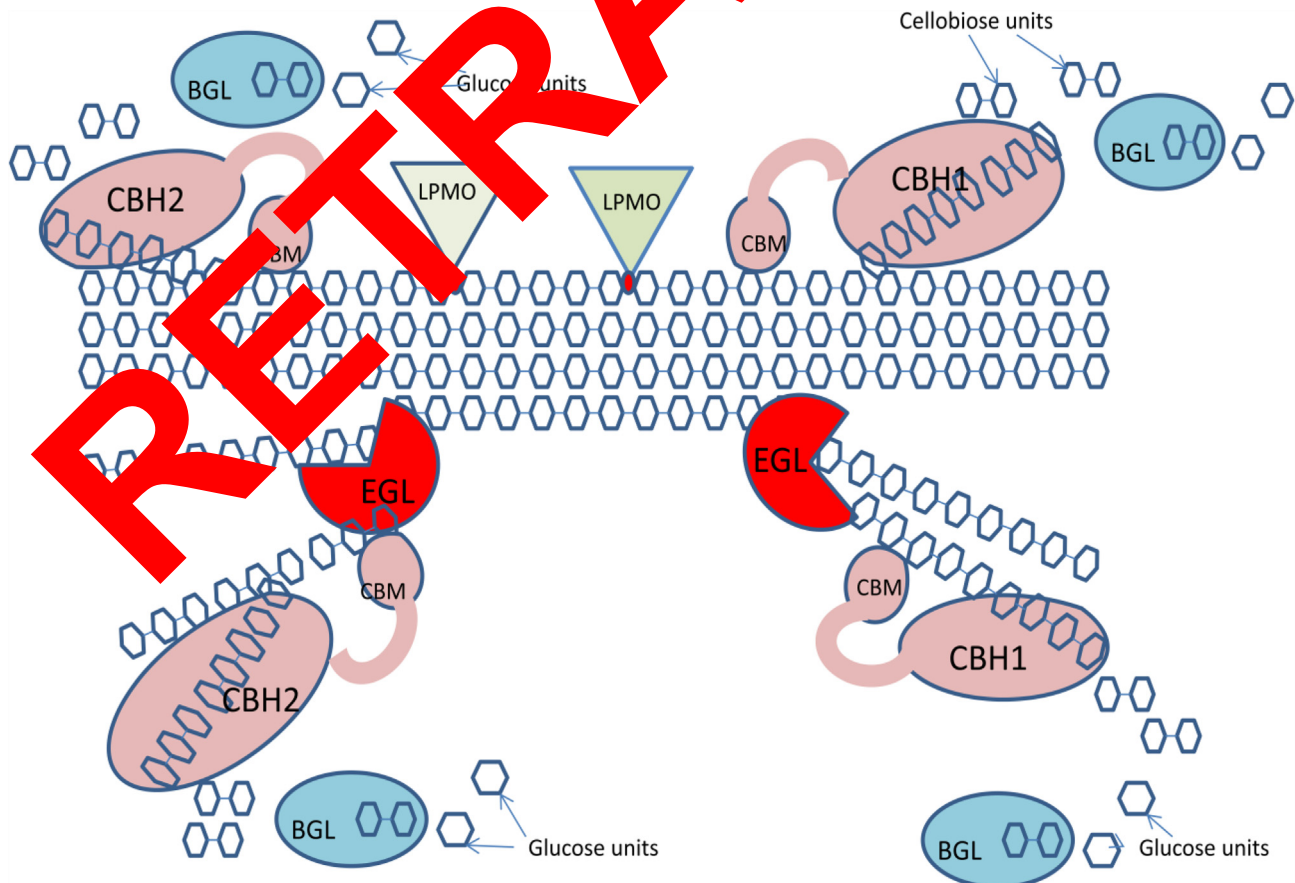


Fig. 1. Cellulase component acting in synergism to hydrolyze cellulose chain.

The understanding of lignocellulose matrix structure and conversion mechanism of hydrolytic and accessory enzymes (e.g., xylanases and β -glucosidases) can provide significant insights on the performance of cellulase cocktails for enhancing saccharification efficiency (Hu et al., 2011; Zimbardi et al., 2013). Therefore, screening of novel microorganisms and bioprospecting in search of superior enzymes is an ambitious project that needs targeted approach, thus resulted superior enzymes may act synergistically with existing commercial cellulases for increasing its hydrolytic efficiency. There is a commercial need of a complex and coherent enzyme cocktail, which may act synergistically to unlock the complexity of lignocellulose polymer and convert it into fermentable sugars to the greater extent possible. These enzymes are the major costly inputs in the overall process and bringing down the cost of enzymatic saccharification is a current challenge. Supplementation of BGL blended cellulase is an effective strategy for maximizing saccharification efficiency. BGL has wider applications and great significance in biomass to bioethanol production.

2. Significance of BGL

BGL is well-characterized, biologically important enzyme that catalyzes the transfer of glycosyl group between oxygen nucleophiles. This transfer reaction results in the hydrolysis of β -glucosidic linkage occurs between carbohydrate residues in aryl-amino-, or alkyl- β -D-glucosides, cyanogenic-glucosides, short chain oligosaccharides and disaccharides under physiological conditions. This also exhibits, synthesis of glycosyl bond between different molecules under defined conditions. Various BGLs are found in all domains of living organisms, where they play essential role in the removal of non-reducing terminal glucosyl residues from saccharides and glycosides. BGLs function in glycolipid and exogenous glycoside metabolism in animals, defense, cell differentiation, cell wall β -glucan turnover, phytohormone activation, and release of aromatic compounds in plants, and biomass conversion in microorganisms. These functions lead BGL to have wide range of and industrial applications (Cairns and Egan, 2010). In recent years, there has been considerable attention on BGLs due to their potential roles in various biotechnological processes such as hydrolysis of isoflavone glucosides, production of fuel ethanol from lignocellulosic biomass, release of aromatic compounds from flavorless precursor etc., The physiological roles of BGL are diverse depended on its occurrence in biological systems and its location. For example, cellulose hydrolysis and cellulase production occurs due to transglycosylation activity of BGL in prokaryotes. β -glucan synthesis by BGL during cell wall development, hormone metabolism, fruit ripening and defense mechanisms in plants, whereas BGL is involved in the hydrolysis of glycosyl ceramides in humans and mammals. Hence, BGL deficiency causes in human's results into Gaucher's disease, a non-neuropathic lysosomal storage disorder (Lieberman et al., 2007). Moreover, hydrolysis of soybean isoflavone glycosides is an important application of BGL in industries.

In recent decade, due to the advent of biofuel program from biomass via enzymatic route, BGL has acquired center position being the rate-limiting component in the enzyme cocktail. BGL is the rate-limiting enzyme because it is responsible for the final step of lignocellulose conversion of cellobiose and/or short cellodextrins into glucose (Singhania et al., 2013). *Trichoderma reesei* produced cellulases containing endoglucanases (18%), cellobiohydrolases (72%) and β -glucosidases (<1%) (Margeot et al., 2009). The β -glucosidase from *Aspergillus niger* is generally used to complement the cellulolytic cocktail of *T. reesei* (Del Pozo et al., 2012). Hence, β -glucosidases supplementation in the enzymatic cocktails is inevitable for formulating an efficient cellulolytic cocktail. Various studies showed, enzymatic mixture augmentation with β -glucosidases

or microbes with greater β -glucosidase potential have resulted an increase in sugar yields (Del Pozo et al., 2012; Sukumaran et al., 2009).

The β -glucosidase proportion is meager in most of the commercial cellulases, which results accumulation of cellobioses and celooligosaccharides in the medium and causes catabolite repression on endoglucanase and cellobiohydrolase (Wang et al., 2013). Enzyme giants such as Novozymes have come up with series of cellulase cocktail specifically for biomass hydrolysis, the first of being Celluclast, which is different from CellicTec2 (the advanced version) in being deficient of β -glucosidase. Though Novozyme keep on improving its cocktail and came up with CellicTec3 which is superior to even CellicTec2 as has been reported to be supplemented with additional auxiliary enzymes. The cellulases producing microorganisms produce BGL at different capacities and there are different isoforms of BGL and their expression levels varied depending on media composition or physiological conditions, which induces BGL isoforms production (Singhania et al., 2011; Rajasree et al., 2013). Each BGL may have different properties, however in the crude sample they are analyzed together and separate analysis is possible only after purification. Purification of BGL is usually done using artificial substrate in the fermentation broth.

3. BGL Properties

Information is lacking about the interaction of BGL with their substrates, especially with respect to the aglycone moiety, which forms the basis of tremendous diversity in terms of substrate range and is the reason for subtle differences in substrate specificity. Usually BGL activities are measured using artificial substrates such as pNPG (para nitrophenyl beta-D-glucopyranoside) or methyl umbelliferyl beta-D-glucoside (MUG). BGL activities are also measured with its real substrate cellobiose. Most of the BGL are likely to show high catalytic activity and high k_m against artificial substrate e.g., pNPG and MUG but not with cellobiose. Kinetics of the BGL depends on the configuration of its substrate, however cellobiose requires a conformational change for catalysis. BGL has a very rigid structure in S1 substrate binding site which accommodate first glucose of cellobiose but the second glucose of cellobiose may change the conformation using rotation of the σ -bond of the glucoside so as to fit in the substrate binding site (Nam et al., 2010). Though, it is not needed in case of pNPG where nitrophenol follows the same binding patterns as of glucose. This is the reason behind low K_{cat}/K_m of BGL towards cellobiose than the substrate pNPG. Hence, it is necessary to investigate potentialities of BGL with cellobiose rather than pNPG or MUG for accurate accountability of the natural process.

Single strain can produce multiple BGLs depending on the nutritional and physical parameters (Singhania et al., 2011). Different BGLs may belong to different glycosyl hydrolase (GH) families, as they differ in their properties and structures. Studying the BGL classification based on their structure is very important to gain insights on their functionality.

4. Classification of BGLs

BGLs have been classified into glycoside hydrolase (GH) families GH1, GH3, GH5, GH9, and GH30, based on their amino acid sequences, while other β -glucosidases remained to be classified. An alternative classification system has been developed for glycoside hydrolases based on amino acid sequence and structural similarity (Henrissat, 1991; Henrissat and Davies, 1997; Cantarel et al., 2009). In this system, those enzymes with overall amino acid sequence similarity and well conserved sequence motifs are grouped into the same family. The families that have similar

catalytic domain structures and conserved catalytic amino acids, suggestive of a common ancestry and catalytic mechanism, are grouped into clans (Henrissat and Davies, 1997; Cantarel et al., 2009). Of these clans, GH-A has the largest number of families, and it includes the β -glucosidase-containing families GH1, GH5, and GH30, which consists of proteins with (β/α) 8-barrel structures. In contrast, the active site of GH3 enzymes comprises two domains, while GH9 enzymes have (α/α) 6 barrel structures. GH1 includes the largest number of characterized β -glucosidases. The mechanism by which GH1 enzymes recognize and hydrolyzing substrates with different specificities remains an area of intense study (Cairns and Esen, 2010). GH1 BGLs have shown several desirable properties required for biofuel applications. One of the most important properties for BGL is its glucose tolerance capacity, which decides its importance in cellulase cocktail and it is the main factor required to drive the reaction forward at higher glucose concentration.

5. Specific traits of BGL

5.1. Glucose tolerance

Product inhibition of BGL by glucose is considered to be a limiting step in enzymatic hydrolysis of biomass, especially when higher sugar yields are required. Mostly the BGLs are subjected to feedback inhibition by its own product; glucose which results into bulk addition of BGL into cellulase cocktail to achieve desired yield during hydrolysis of biomass resulting in increased cost of enzymes. To circumvent this issue glucose tolerant BGLs are used. Glucose tolerance of BGL is a significant desirable property capable of decreasing the cellulolytic enzyme loads during pulp and cellulose hydrolysis needed to attain acceptable yields, thus reducing the costs of bioethanol production (Singhania et al., 2013).

Remarkably, some BGL belongs to the GH1 family and exhibit unusual properties, being tolerant to or even stimulated by high glucose concentrations. Glucose tolerance of BGLs is often coupled to a stimulatory effect of glucose on substrate degradation in a given range of glucose concentrations (up to 400 mM). This property seems to be exclusive to some β -glucosyl hydrolase family 1 (GH1) (Henrissat, 1991; Cantarel et al., 2009). Furthermore, the family GH3 β -glucosidases are not known to be glucose tolerant as are inhibited by glucose. However, there are reports where GH3 β -glucosidases have shown glucose tolerance up to 400 mM glucose (Ramani et al., 2015). The limitation can also be tackled by removing glucose via its product, for which technologies such as membrane filters could be used to separate monomers of sugars so as to avoid feedback inhibition. Simultaneous saccharification and fermentation could also be an answer to this limitation; while glucose is converted to ethanol simultaneously hence glucose remains always at lower concentration. Thus feedback inhibition of BGL is a major challenge to circumvent, when we need glucose tolerant BGLs.

5.1.1. Structural basis for glucose tolerance in BGLs family GH1

The structural basis for the glucose tolerance and stimulation of BGLs is still elusive. Elucidation of the mechanisms of glucose tolerance and stimulation of the GH1 BGL would definitely be crucial to improve their application through enzyme engineering. As suggested by enzymatic assays; BGL stimulation is regulated either through an allosteric effect by glucose binding to a secondary site (Zanoelo et al., 2004; Souza et al., 2010) or by kinetic modulation of enzyme turnover associated with trans-glycosylation (Uchima et al., 2011, 2013). Yang et al. (2015) also compared the primary and tertiary structures of two GH1 β -glucosidases with distinct glucose dependence. They mutated some putative

glucose-dependence relevant sites to investigate their exact roles. Both biochemical and structural characterization of the mutants suggested that some sites at the entrance and middle of the substrate channel regulate the effects of glucose, and the relative binding affinity/preference of these sites to glucose modulates the glucose dependence. Structural bases for the effects of glucose on GH1 and GH3 BGL remained unclear (Liu et al., 2011). To address mechanism, first crystal structure of glucose stimulated fungal BGL was studied at native and glucose complexed forms, revealed the shape and electrostatic properties of the entrance to the active site (including +2 subsite), mainly determine the glucose tolerance. The aromatic Trp168 and the aliphatic residues are conserved in glucose-tolerant GH1 enzymes and contribute to relieving enzyme inhibition by imposing constraints on the +2 subsite that limit the access of glucose to the 1 subsite. The structural determinants for glucose tolerance in BGLs highlights the importance of the steric constraints imposed by the unique active site entrance and the +2 subsite which limit glucose access to the 1 subsite (de Giuseppe et al., 2014). The geometry of the active site pocket may support a secondary catalytic trans-glycosylation reaction using glucose as acceptor. It is in agreement with the stimulatory mechanism previously demonstrated for GH1 β -glucosidase isolated from a microbial metagenomic sample (Uchima et al., 2011, 2013). This GH1-family enzyme (Henrissat, 1991; Cantarel et al., 2009) presents shown approximately twofold activation at 50 and 100 mM concentrations of glucose or xylose, respectively, and maintains full or higher activity up to 450 mM glucose or 730 mM xylose (Souza et al., 2013). In a study Liu et al. (2011) showed that 184th residue of fungal BGL family 1 could be responsible for its glucose tolerance which was proved based on site directed mutagenesis studies, where mutant strain exhibited better glucose tolerance level from 14.9 compared to 14.9 in the wild one (Liu et al., 2011). Moreover, *H. insolens* BGL showed high catalytic efficiency for cellobiose hydrolysis and good thermal stability, thus being a very attractive biocatalyst for industrial use in plant-biomass saccharification processes (Souza et al., 2010). The GH1 family β -glucosidases are 10–1000-fold more glucose tolerant than GH3 BGLs, and comparative structural analysis shows a clear correlation between active-site accessibility and glucose tolerance. The active site of GH1 BGLs is located in a deep and narrow cavity, which is in contrast to the shallow pocket in the GH3 family BGLs. These findings shed light on the molecular basis for glucose tolerance and indicate that GH1 BGLs are more suitable than GH3 BGLs for biotechnological applications involving lignocellulosic biomass saccharification (de Giuseppe et al., 2014). The homology modeling of BGL from *Bacillus subtilis* which was cloned and expressed into *E. coli* revealed that protein has 19 α -helices and 4 β -sheets and adopted (β/α)8 TIM barrel structure (Chamoli et al., 2016). Substrate docking and LigPlot analysis depicted the amino acids of active site involved in hydrogen bonding and hydrophobic interactions with substrates.

Structure-based protein-engineering methods are proven strategies to obtain improved enzymes (Lundemo et al., 2013), and de Giuseppe et al. (2014) have provided valuable information to guide rational approaches aiming to integrate glucose tolerance/activation with other desirable properties to generate catalytically efficient BGL for biofuel production and other industrial applications. It also provides fresh insight into the current understanding of the properties and mechanisms of GH1 β -glycosidases and related enzymes that modulate their activity via feedback control mechanisms (Yang et al., 2015).

5.2. Inhibition and induction by glucose

BGL commonly gets inhibited by glucose, its own end product but it gets stimulated also by glucose. Uchima et al. (2011) reported an unusual finding that one of the BGL from *Neotermes*

koshunensis (lower termite) successfully expressed in *Aspergillus oryzae*, was stimulated by 1.3-fold when glucose was present in the reaction mixture at a concentration of 200 mM. The BGL from *Thermoanaerobacterium aotearoense* cloned and expressed in *E. coli* induced at 50–250 mM glucose concentration and tolerant to glucose inhibition with K_i of 800 mM glucose concentration (Yang et al., 2016). These characteristics to stimulate enzyme activity by glucose make it of great interest for biotechnological applications, especially for bioethanol production (Uchima et al., 2011). Kuusk and Våljamäe (2017) have analyzed different reaction schemes using the catalysis by retaining BGLs as a model. They found that simple competition of inhibitor with nonproductive substrate binding could account for enzyme activation by inhibitor without involving any allosteric effects. The transglycosylation of inhibitor also explains the inhibitor effect on enzyme activation. For both mechanisms, the activation caused through k_{cat} increase due to increasing inhibitor concentration, while k_{cat}/K_m are always decreased. Therefore, the activation by inhibitors was more pronounced at high substrate concentrations. Possible contribution of these mechanisms in inhibitor-dependent enzyme activation has been demonstrated based on the rate-limiting glycosidic bond hydrolysis, also particular glucose-unit-binding subsites interaction (Kuusk and Våljamäe, 2017). Transglycosylation is another unique feature of BGL, showing synthetic activity along with hydrolase activity.

5.3. Transglycosylation

BGL normally catalyzes the hydrolysis of glycosidic linkages in disaccharide or glucose substituted molecules, and also depicts a unique property of transglycosylation under conditions that favor a back reaction that can be applied to promote the synthesis of oligosaccharides. Transglycosylation occurs at high product (glucose) concentration (Bohlin et al., 2013). Oligosaccharides play numerous roles in biological systems such as molecular recognition in intercellular communication and signal transduction and have shown considerable potential as therapeutic agents. Due to varied roles of β -glucosidases in nature, the satellite enzymes can be of use in several synthetic reactions also reviewed by Gupta et al. (2002). In recent time transglycosylation capacity of β -glucosidase was found to be very beneficial for cellulose induction among fungi. There are reports that fungal BGL when added to a high concentration of glucose switch to syntheses active and generate oligosaccharides such as cellobiose, sophorose, etc., which are known as inducers and enhance fungi to produce cellulases. This property has been explored and had been reported as economical ways of generating cellulase inducers which are otherwise quite costly and add to the overall cost of the enzyme production process making it uneconomical. Transglycosylation could also be a reason for inhibition of BGL. It is usually thought to be a feedback inhibition by its own product glucose. Bohlin et al. (2013) concluded in his study that the hydrolytic slowdown at high substrate concentrations solely relies on an increased flow through the transglycosylation pathway and not an inhibition that delay the catalytic cycle. The experimental data was modeled to obtain kinetic parameters for both hydrolysis and transglycosylation which would be useful for the evaluation of BGLs for industrial use.

Study on structures of BGL has enabled researchers to alter its properties at DNA level to our benefits. Jeng et al. (2012) has mutated to attacking nucleophile in β -glucosidase to convert it into a glycosynthase for the synthesis of oligosaccharides. Several amino acids, including the two catalytic glutamates, of a BGL from *Neotermes koshunensis* were mutated in order to elucidate the detailed mechanism of hydrolysis and transglycosylation. It was revealed from structural studies that Glu193 not only acts as the catalytic acid/base but also plays an important role in controlling

substrate entry and product release. It was found that new gluco-conjugated products were lodged in the active-site pocket in the crystal structures of the mutant, implying that mutation enhanced transglycosylation activity. It appears to be suitable for development as a useful tool for the enzymatic synthesis of numerous therapeutic oligosaccharides via the transglycosylation reaction (Jeng et al., 2012). This finding highlights an innovative way to further improve β -glucosidases by genetic modification for the enzymatic synthesis of oligosaccharides to be useful for enzyme production.

In this review, we focus mainly on the enhancement of β -glucosidases production by genetic modification and its significance for unlocking the trapped sugar from complex lignocellulosic polymers, ultimately resulting in enhanced sugar to ethanol yield.

6. Genetic modification

Genetic modification is one of the most popular tool which enables to combine multiple desirable traits into a single organism. It can be used to engineer microbes for high metabolite production which could vary from simple proteins to highly specific therapeutic proteins. However, in some cases may not be as simple as it sounds because of the inherent complexity of the organisms itself or the metabolites needed to be expressed. Cloning and expressing prokaryotic genes in bacterial systems are comparatively easier than the eukaryotic gene which are more complex and have introns and exons in its genomic sequences. Efforts are needed in the direction to obtain engineered BGL with glucose tolerant properties along with the search of glucose tolerant native BGL source. Several genes from a large number of bacterial, mold, yeast, plant, and animal systems have been cloned and expressed in both *E. coli* and eukaryotic hosts such as *S. cerevisiae*, *Pichia stipitis* and filamentous fungi. The complexity of the genetic engineering might be dealt elsewhere; rather than going deep into the process, we shall discuss that how researchers have employed this powerful tool for altering BGL producing capacity of microorganisms.

Though exogenous supplementation of β -glucosidase overcomes the inhibition, the high cost and low availability of β -glucosidase turns the ethanol production very expensive (Ramani et al., 2015). If the heterologous enzyme can be produced in the host microorganisms producing other components, it becomes more economical as separate production and mixing at optimal ratio is not required saving time and energy. Cloning and overexpression of BGL resulted in BGL rich cellulase production which improved hydrolysis efficiencies when acted towards biomass (Yang et al., 2016). Thus cloning and overexpression of β -glucosidases is highly desirable for increasing cellulase efficiency resulting in the cost economics of the saccharification of the biomass.

It has been proposed since last few decades that if desired gene for BGL can be cloned and expressed in heterologous strain, it would be very beneficial much more than generating cocktail by mixing enzymes outside. Although BGL with desirable properties whose expression level is low in its parent strain; cloned and expressed strongly in another host will also be advantageous. Several thermotolerant BGLs from bacteria have been cloned and expressed in *E. coli*. Table 1 gives an account of rBGL its source, host and properties which is an updated version of Singhania et al. (2013).

6.1. Bacterial rBGL

Bacteria are also known for cellulolytic activities but most of their enzymes are produced intracellularly unlike fungi which

Table 1
Properties of recombinant BGL.

Source	Host organism	Properties of recombinant BGL	References
<i>Caldicellulosiruptor saccharolyticus</i> DSM 8903	<i>E. coli</i>	Optimum activity at pH 5.5 and 70 °C for p-nitrophenyl (pNP)-β-D-glucopyranoside. The half-lives of the enzyme at 60, 70, and 80 °C were 250, 24.3, and 0.4 h, respectively.	Hong et al. (2009)
<i>Bacillus subtilis</i>	<i>E. coli</i>	Specific activity of 54.04 U/mg, Optimum pH 6.0 and temperature 60 °C, Ki for glucose 1.9 mM, Kcat/Km against p-nitrophenyl-β-D-glucopyranoside (292.53 mM ⁻¹ s ⁻¹)	Chamoli et al. (2016)
<i>Thermoanaerobacterium aotearoense</i>	<i>E. coli</i>	pH 6.0 and temperature 60 °C, specific activity 256.3 U/mg wet cells, km and Vmax of 25.45 mM and 740.5 U/mg, respectively against cellobiose, Ki 800 mM against glucose and activated at 50–250 mM of glucose solution	Yang et al. (2016)
A metagenomic library of rumen cattle feed		highest sp activity of 2.5 × 10 ³ U/mg for pNPG, km 0.309 mmol/L and Vmax 7.292 μmol/min, Optimum pH 5.0, temp 38 °C	Li et al. (2014)
Marine microbial metagenomic library		Half Ki 1000 mM and get activated at glucose concentration < 400 mM, belong to GH1 and stable at high cations and NaCl concentrations	Tang et al. (2010)
Compost		Glucose tolerance at 1000 mM and possess transglycosylation activity	Uchiyama et al. (2013)
<i>Neotermes koshunensis</i>	<i>Aspergillus oryzae</i>	rBGL stimulated by 1.3-fold in presence of 200 mM glucose. km and Vmax were 0.77 mM and 16 U/mg. Active at pH 5.0–9.0.	Uchima et al. (2011)
<i>Penicillium funiculosum</i> NCL1	<i>Pichia pastoris</i>	rBGL showed optimal activity at pH 5.0 and 60 °C, high substrate conversion rate of 2,083 mg/min/mg with cellobiose shows tolerance up to 400 mM glucose	Ramani et al. (2015)
<i>Neocallimastix patriciarum</i>	<i>Pichia pastoris</i>	GH family 3, 34.5 U/mg against cellobiose, optimally active at 40 °C and pH 6.0. it was better in saccharification than Novozyme 188	Chen et al. (2012)
<i>Paecilomyces thermophila</i>	<i>Pichia pastoris</i>	GH family 3, 274.4 U/ml, optimal pH 6 and temp 60 °C	Yan et al. (2012)
<i>Saccharomycopsis fibuligera</i>	<i>S. cerevisiae</i>	1.02 IU/mg	Shen et al., (2008)
<i>Talaromyces emersonii</i>	<i>T. reesei</i>	GH family 3, thermostable active at 71.5 °C, Vmax 612 IU/mg, Km 254 mM for glucose	Murray et al. (2004)
<i>Periconia sp.</i>	<i>Pichia pastoris</i>	Thermotolerant BGL, optimal activity at pH 5–7	Harnpicharnchai et al. (2009)
<i>Penicillium oxalicum</i> (wild type)	<i>Penicillium oxalicum</i>	BGL1 over-expressing mutant 11–13 particularly improved the β-glucosidase activity at a factor of 65-folds, resulting in levels of up to 100 IU/ml. The mutant 14–32 with over-expression of BGL4 achieved the highest glucose yield in the saccharification of delignified corncob residue at only 25% enzyme load compared to the parent strain RE	Yao et al. (2015)
<i>Penicillium decumannens</i>	<i>T. reesei</i>	Six-to-eightfold more BGL activity than the parent strain RE	Ma et al. (2011)
<i>Aspergillus niger</i>	<i>T. reesei</i>	5.3 IU/ml (106) times more active BGL	Wang and Xia, (2011)
<i>Aspergillus fumigatus</i>	<i>Pichia pastoris</i>	Active at pH 6.0 and at 60 °C with activity of about 100 IU/mg	Liu et al. (2012)
<i>Periconia sp.</i>	<i>T. reesei</i> QM9414	10.5-fold BGL activity increased from 2.2 to 23.9 IU/mg, thermotolerant and active in acidic pH	Dashtban and Qin, (2012)
<i>Fervibacterium islandicum</i>	<i>E. coli</i>	GH family 3, thermostable	Jabbour et al. (2012)
<i>Chaetomium thermophilum</i>	<i>Pichia pastoris</i>	Optimally active at pH 5.0 and 60 °C	Xu et al. (2011)
<i>Aspergillus aculeatus</i>	<i>T. reesei</i>	10 U/mg against cellobiose	Nakazawa et al. (2012)

produces extracellular proteins. There are reports on thermotolerant BGL from bacteria (Hong et al., 2016; Chamoli et al., 2016) which are produced intracellularly with desirable properties. The *bgl* gene from these strains were cloned, overexpressed and resulted in enhanced activity as well as improved properties. Yang et al. (2016) cloned and sequenced the *bgl* gene from *Thermoanaerobacterium aotearoense*. The BGL belongs to the GH1 with the canonical glycosyl hydrolase family 1 (GH1) (β/α)₈ TIM barrel fold. The enzyme showed relatively high temperature and pH stability with its highest activity respectively at 60 °C and 6.0 proving the fact that most of the thermostable BGL belongs to GH family 1. The complementation of the purified BGL to commercial cellulase resulted in about 20% enhancement in saccharification efficiency while hydrolyzing sugarcane bagasse (Yang et al., 2016). These properties of the purified BGL should have important practical implication in its potential applications for better industrial production of glucose or bioethanol started from lignocellulosic biomass. Another glucose tolerant thermostable BGL was cloned from *Bacillus subtilis* in *E. coli* and overexpressed (Chamoli et al., 2016). The enzyme retained more than 85% of maximum activity after 1 h preincubation at 60 °C and exhibited high tolerance against detergents and organic solvents. A rBGL from *Caldicellulosiruptor saccharolyticus* DSM 8903 with a specific activity of 13 U/mg hydrolyzed cello-oligosaccharides from n = 2 to 5 as substrates using 4 mM sugars to glucose at 70 °C within 16 h at 3 U/

mg of enzyme, which is significant (Hong et al., 2009). A novel cellulase recycling method has been developed using a combination of cellulosomes of *Clostridium thermocellum* and *Thermoanaerobacter brockii* β-glucosidase (Waeonukul et al., 2013). The efficient BGL secretion with exploration of structural and functional relationship offer vistas for large scale production and various industrial applications.

Secretion of recombinant protein into the medium using the fungal system, offers some advantages over intracellular production by *E. coli*. The *E. coli* system has a drawback in that the formation of disulfide bonds is hampered by a highly reducing environment in the cytoplasm. In contrast, carrier protein-mediated secretion of recombinant protein in fungi would allow the correct folding of the protein with the aid of chaperones and oxidizing environment in the lumen of the endoplasmic reticulum, thereby increasing the possibility to obtain a protein harboring the native structure (Uchima et al., 2011).

6.2. Eukaryotic rBGL (fungi and yeasts)

Filamentous fungi are known to be a good BGL producer and a number of BGL from glycosyl hydrolase family 3 and 1 have been purified and characterized from various fungi. In spite of bringing good producers of the enzyme, reports on cloning of BGL from fungi are relatively low. This is mostly due to the complexities

associated with the presence of introns in their genes and due to complexities associated with glycosylation. Filamentous fungi are known to produce a broad range of metabolites at significant quantities. Their ability to grow on cheaper substrate have made them potential source of metabolites for industrial applications. Knowledge of fungal genetics has accumulated since years of research and industrial applications. Along with the ability to secrete proteases they can perform posttranslational modification such as glycosylation and disulfidation (Wang et al., 2005). Most of the filamentous fungi are transformed with plasmid which integrates into their genome and thereby providing stability to the fungal transformants. Thus filamentous fungi have tremendous potential to be employed as hosts for recombinant DNA. Genus *Aspergillus* and strain *Trichoderma reesei* have been used as hosts for expressing several genes of fungal as well as nonfungal origin.

Since, *T. reesei* produces the other components in sufficient quantity; it would be of high value to engineer *T. reesei* with gene of BGL having desirable properties such as thermostability and acidic pH tolerant; which can produce sufficient amount of BGL leading to better biomass hydrolysis rate. Engineering *T. reesei* in such a way that it produces the whole suit of saccharifying enzymes including BGL could be one of the approaches to reduce the processing cost.

Yeasts have been also well exploited both for the source of *bgl* gene as well as the host organisms to express fungal BGL. The *bgl2* gene from *T. reesei* along with alpha-galactosidase gene was cloned into *S. cerevisiae* and expressed both the enzyme extracellularly (Zhang et al., 2012). Production of cellulosic ethanol was demonstrated by expressing heterologous endoglucanase and BGL gene from *Clostridium thermocellum* and *S. fibuligera*, respectively in *S. cerevisiae* (Jeon et al., 2009). An industrial ethanol producing strain *S. cerevisiae* have been constructed which could produce ethanol directly from microcrystalline cellulose by simultaneous saccharification with 88% of the theoretical yield of ethanol.

Pichia pastoris, due to its exceptional high cellulase protein production capacity has been an ideal gene expression system for industrial enzyme production and was exploited for heterologous protein expression. *Pichia* is known to possess β -glucosidase producing ability and has been used traditionally as a host to clone and express recombinant protein from fungi (Ramani et al., 2015; Chen et al., 2012). Thermostable native *bgl* genes from *A. fumigatus* were cloned and expressed in *P. pastoris* stable at 70 °C, at pH 4.0–7.0 which proves its suitability for lignocellulose hydrolysis (Liu et al., 2012). Ramani et al. (2015) have cloned cDNA encoding BGL from *Penicillium funiculosum* NCIM 1197 by consensus RTPCR. Though there are no reports on cloning of fungal GH3 protein in *Pichia* but a few reports are there on overexpression. It was also tolerant to glucose concentration up to 400 mM. Thus, it was a suitable host to express efficient cellulase cocktail, however GH1 BGLs are not glucose tolerant. It exhibited twofold increase in glucose yield when supplemented with crude cellulase of *T. reesei* Rut-C30 in cellulose hydrolysis (Ramani et al., 2015) proving it a thermo- and glucose tolerant BGL and a potential supplement for commercial cellulase in cellulose hydrolysis and thereby assures profitability in bioethanol production.

Chen et al. (2012) also engineered *Pichia pastoris* for expressing a cDNA encoding BGL isolated from the buffalo rumen fungus *Neocallimastix patriciarum*. It was found to be better than the commercial BGL, Novozym188 and saccharification efficiency was increased (Chen et al., 2012). Lee et al. (2013) engineered a *Saccharomyces cerevisiae* strain expressing a cellodextrin transporter and an intracellular β -glucosidase from *Neurospora crassa*. This engineered strain could be employed for simultaneous saccharification and fermentation with enhanced yield at reduced costs. Protein expressions could be highly elevated by cloning the gene under

the control of a strong promoter and cellobiohydrolase 1 (*cbh1*) is such a strong promoter. The *cbh1* has been the widely used promoter in eukaryotic system for expression of different protein and has been extensively used for heterologous gene expression constructs in *T. reesei* which is commonly used in commercial enzyme preparation (Celluclast) with enhanced BGL and filter paper activity (Wang and Xia, 2011; Zhang et al., 2010). However there are reports that *cbh1* and *cbh2* (*cel6a*) promoters which are known to be very strong, were found to reduce overall cellulase activity (Rahman et al., 2009a). Use of *xyn3* promoter to drive expression of *T. reesei* BGL1 (*Cel3a*) was recently reported greater BGL activity than the parent strain without significant change in total cellulase activity (Rahman et al., 2009b). Recently, recombinant *T. reesei* was constructed with *A. aculeatus* BGL gene that expressed under the control of *xyn1* promoter, capable of saccharification of pretreated cellulosic biomass. Recombinant strain expressed 25-fold higher BGL than that of endogenous *T. reesei* and 63-fold higher than that of the parent strain, *A. aculeatus* (Nakazawa et al., 2012). Li et al. (2012) used a strong constitutive promoter of gene *pde_02864* encoding phosphodiesterase protein S8, which was used to over-express three β -glucosidases: BGL1, BGL4, and BGL5 of *Penicillium funiculosum* by Yao et al. (2016). It could be interesting to have hyper BGL producing gene with desired properties cloned in filamentous fungi which are already producing other the components of cellulase, which in turn will help to make the process economic.

In the last 2 years, *Penicillium oxalicum* mutant (JU-A10-T) produces cellulase enzyme preparations at industrial scale in China (Liu et al., 2013). Recently, its genome has been sequenced, providing valuable information to mine novel components that play key roles in biomass saccharification (Liu et al., 2013b). The Recombinant Expression Regulatory Network (REXRN) technology has been developed as a new strategy to engineer fungi that enhance cellulase and protein production. One mutant in particular (RE-10 from REXRN) displayed a drastic increase in cellulase and hemicellulase production, and produced even higher values compared to the industrial strain JU-A10-T (Yao et al., 2015). However, the β -glucosidase has not yet been improved to the same level as other inducible cellulases. This makes further improvement of its β -glucosidase activity necessary. Yao et al. (2016) have presented a systematic over-expression analysis of nine β -glucosidase encoding genes in the wild-type strain of *P. oxalicum*. All mutants showed significantly enhanced levels of β -glucosidase at transcriptional, protein, and activity levels. Furthermore, the inducible promoter from *bgl2* was used to conditionally over-express the β -glucosidases BGL1 and BGL4. They over-expressed BGL1, BGL4, or BGL5 using both constitutive as well as inducible promoter. High yielding β -glucosidase producers were obtained and the yields were elevated from 2–65-fold. Surprisingly, this induced expression strategy has improved expression efficiency significantly. In addition, they substantially reduced the enzyme loads in the saccharification of a natural lignocellulose material delignified corncob residue. The mutants with over-expression of BGL4 achieved 75% reduction in enzyme load compared to the parental strain (Yao et al., 2016).

6.3. Metagenomic rBGL

Thus, metagenomic approach allows us to clone the microbial genome directly from the environmental samples into the culturable bacteria. Complex microbial community analysis coupled with various environmental habitats revealed that only a small proportion of microorganisms surviving on earth can be cultivated in vitro, while majority of them remain unculturable (Vartoukian et al., 2010). Several BGLs have been obtained via metagenomic strategies (Bao et al., 2012). As our interest is only the gene

producing BGL and not the microorganism, the gene can be isolated, cloned and expressed. These widespread unculturable unexplored microbes hold diverse group of biocatalysts that are stable and active under different extreme conditions (Fernández-Arrojo et al., 2010), which could be exploited for benefits of mankind. Metagenomics is one of the key strategies for discovering diverse biocatalysts encoded in nature (Jiang et al., 2011). This approach has been successfully used to identify biocatalysts with desired activities by applying low-throughput function-based screening of environmental DNA clone libraries (Steele et al., 2009). Even after the advances of third generation sequencing; complete genes availability from metagenomic assemblies is limited (Pareek et al., 2011). Congregated mining of the genetic information of β -glucosidase was explored across different environments including hydrothermal spring (Schröder et al., 2014), wetlands (Nam et al., 2008), sludge (Jiang et al., 2011), pulp wastewater (Yang et al., 2013), gut and rumen (Wang et al., 2012; Bao et al., 2012; Zhu et al., 2011; Healy et al., 1995), anaerobic digesters (Healy et al., 1995) and compost (Uchiyama et al., 2013). Moreover, some detailed biochemical and molecular descriptions of metagenome-derived β -glucosidases have been exposed to display their unique characteristics. Reports demonstrates metagenome derived BGL are being stable and active at wide range of pH and extreme temperature as 105 °C (Jiang et al., 2011; Schröder et al., 2014). The Bgl1D derived from alkaline polluted soil is remarkably stable across a broad range of pH (5.5–10.5) and is not affected by high concentration of metal ions (Jiang et al., 2011). A thermostable glycosyl hydrolase 1 family BGL from archeal origin, isolated from hydrothermal spring, was active even at 105 °C and also performed well in the presence of different reagents and solvents (Schröder et al., 2014). Another thermostable BGL was isolated from the functional screening of a metagenomic library from termite gut which showed its highest activity at 90 °C (Wang et al., 2012). One unit BGL with very high glucose tolerance ability of up to 1000 mM was obtained from compost and it showed high transglycosylation activity by generating sophorose, laminarose, cellobiose, and gentiobiose (Uchiyama et al., 2013). It could be a good candidate for obtaining high glucose concentration in hydrolysate to convert into bio-ethanol as well as generate inhibitors for cellulase production. Similar glucose tolerance was exhibited by the BGL derived from marine metagenome retaining 50% of its activity even at 1000 mM glucose (Fang et al., 2010). Interestingly, it was activated by glucose at concentrations lower than 400 mM. This enzyme was also active at high NaCl concentration signifying its origin from marine environment. Nam et al. (2008) attempted successfully to engineer the protein extracted from wetland in order to enhance stability and activity. All of these selected BGL proteins show high sequence similarity with the sequences available in database which proves novelty.

There are few known BGLs but novel ones which have been reported from metagenomic origin. Li et al. (2014) isolated a new BGL from a metagenomic library of cattle rumen feeding with *Miscanthus sinensis* by the function-based screening, belonging to glycoside hydrolase family 3 (GH3). It was recombinantly expressed, purified and biochemically characterized and was activated by glucose at the concentration lower than 40 mM. These new entries from unculturable microbial systems aid to incorporate novel insights into the structure–function relationship and substrate recognition of β -glucosidase and reflect its versatile biotechnological applications.

6.4. Miscellaneous

There is a report where the three functional β -glucosidase genes were obtained from the bacterium *Clostridium cellulovorans* (CcBglA), the fungus *Trichoderma reesei* (TrBgl2), and the termite

Neotermes koshunensis (NkBgl) with the crystal structures of CcBglA, TrBgl2 and NkBgl and expressed in *E. coli* at a level of 70–250 mg/l (Jeng et al., 2011). The overall structures of these enzymes were similar to those belonging to the β -retaining GH1, which have a classical (α/β)₈ TIM barrel fold. Each contains a slot-like active site cleft and a more variable outer opening, related to its function in processing different lengths of β -1,4-linked glucose derivatives. The two essential glutamate residues for hydrolysis are spatially conserved in the active site. According to Jeng et al. (2011) CcBglA exhibits the highest potential for use in the process of lignocellulosics ethanol production especially for the processes of SSF and SSCF due to its high enzyme activity at a moderate reaction temperature near neutral pH. The structural and functional properties of these three β -glucosidases from various biological sources open important avenues for practical implications (Jeng et al., 2011).

Use of all these techniques could eliminate unwanted cost in ethanol production since cellulolytic enzymes account for 40–50% of the operational expenses (Xu et al., 2009). Thus, genes responsible for efficient and versatile β -glucosidase can be transferred to more industrially tractable and robust organisms to enable the saccharification of the complex biomass polysaccharide.

7. Conclusion

BGL finds a spot among cellulases in biomass hydrolysis mainly because commercially produced cellulases are BGL deficient and substrate-limiting component. Several strategies were adopted to circumvent BGL deficiency in cellulase cocktail e.g., heterologous blending and genetic modification. BGL from metagenome offers excellent advantages, as they are active even at 105 °C. Heterologous over-expression of BGL was successful for blending and preparing cocktail. Cloning and over-expressions under strong promoter are promising strategy for over-producing BGL. BGL tolerance to high glucose and temperature has great significance in biomass bioconversion. BGL structure elucidation enabled targeted modification by site-specific mutation, which could be highly specific.

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