

Biomonitoring of Heavy Metals Pollution in the University of Lagos, Akoka Campus Environment using the Moss *Mnium Hornum* Hedw

Aramide Dolapo Igbari (✉ aoshingboye@unilag.edu.ng)

University of Lagos

Oluwafemi Daniel Amusa

University of Lagos

Divine Favour Orisejobor

University of Lagos

Oluwatoyin Temitayo Ogundipe

University of Lagos

Research Article

Keywords: Biomonitoring, Heavy metal, Air pollution, Geo-accumulation index, Contamination factor

Posted Date: May 24th, 2023

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.21203/rs.3.rs-2926408/v1>

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Abstract

This study investigated the deposition of heavy metals pollution in the University of Lagos, Akoka campus using the moss (*Mnium hornum* Hedw.) as a bioindicator. Samples of *M. hornum* were collected in 2019 from four different locations within the University of Lagos campus: Faculty of Engineering (FE), Lagoon Front (LF), Main Library (ML) and Akintunde Ojo Library (AKT). A control sampling was done at First Estate, Amuwo-Odofin LGA (CL). The concentrations of Cadmium (Cd), Cobalt (Co), Chromium (Cr), Copper (Cu), Iron (Fe), Manganese (Mn), Nickel (Ni), Lead (Pb), and Zinc (Zn) were determined using the Atomic Absorption Spectrometer. Results confirmed the presence of heavy metals in this order Fe>Zn>Mn>Cu>Pb>Ni>Co>Cr>Cd. The concentrations of the examined heavy metals across the locations were lowest in CL except Ni which was lowest in FE and LF (0.03mg/kg). While there was no significant difference in the concentrations of Cd, Co, Cr, Cu, Mn, Ni, and Pb among locations, both Fe (66.00mg/kg) and Zn (64.33mg/kg) were significantly higher in ATK than in the other locations. The contamination factor suggests that ML (C2), FE (C3) and LF (C3) were moderately contaminated while AKT (C5) was seriously contaminated. The index of geo-accumulation revealed that FE ($I_{geo}4$) and ML ($I_{geo}4$) are moderate to severely polluted, LF ($I_{geo}5$) was severely polluted and AKT ($I_{geo}7$) was extremely polluted with the assayed metals. The difference in the occurrence of anthropogenic activities was seen to be the major factor responsible for the variations in the concentration of heavy metals accumulated by the mosses.

INTRODUCTION

The presence of contaminants that can affect the natural composition and chemistry of indoor or outdoor environments can be referred to as air pollution, such contaminants can be in form of particulate matter, gases, vapour, vehicles and automobiles exhaust, forest fires etc. The effects of air pollution include smog, acid rain, respiratory ailment, and reduced agricultural harvest (Paliulis and Blagnyte, 2010). Poor air quality is one of the most serious environmental hazards globally, contributing up to seven million premature deaths annually. Inputs of heavy metals unto vegetation and surface soil results in toxicity plausible to constitute public health hazards (Zinicovscaia et al., 2021).

Heavy metals are particularly significant as pollutants and they are the major cause of air pollution. They are categorized as a group name for metals and metalloids with contamination and eco-toxicity potentials. Heavy metals occurs naturally in the lithosphere and thus released into the atmosphere and water bodies. Anthropogenic activities such as running power plants and automobiles lead to heavy contamination of the environment (Zinicovscaia et al., 2021). Some heavy metals are essential for the normal metabolic functioning of organisms, but when underprovided or excessive, they induce physiological stress with detrimental consequences (Prandan et al., 2017). Once heavy metals are introduced into the environment, it becomes difficult to eliminate them and accumulates in the tissues of plants and other organisms via the food chains. Monitoring heavy metal pollution in the environment is a very complex and expensive process, particularly when it comes to airborne pollutants. Thus, the use of biological systems capable of absorbing and accumulating heavy metals in their tissues to account for a

quantitatively impact of these pollutants on the biosphere and their distance from the sources (Fernandez et al., 2013, Chakraborty & Paratkar, 2006).

Air quality can be monitored by measuring pollutants, including heavy metals discharged directly into environmental compartments by constructing models that describe the distribution of pollutants, or by using bio-indicators. Living organisms such as microbes, planktons, plants and animals useful for assessment of environmental health and biogeographic changes in the environment are known as bioindicators. Naturally occurring bioindicators are used to determine environmental health and are also an important tool for identifying environmental changes, whether positive or negative and their resulting impact on humans (Chakraborty & Paratker, 2006). Bryophytes are important biological indicators due to their widespread distribution and ability to accumulate abundant amounts of heavy metals (Tremper et al., 2004). Bryophyte is a collective term for mosses, hornwort and liverwort, they are groups of spore-producing non-vascular plants that mostly grow on substrates. Mosses are a group of bryophytes that lacks or possess a very thin cuticle and rhizoids; small hair-like appendages that facilitates water uptake and anchorage. Mosses are incredibly common, with more than 12,000 species globally. As a result of their extremely reduced or absent cuticular layer, the ability to absorb and retain nutrients, pollutants, and moisture directly from the atmosphere; mosses are one of the best bioindicator species. They have an efficient mechanism for absorbing metals from their environment and a great capacity for trace element retention. Over the decades, mosses have been used to monitor pollutants in terrestrial air and aquatic ecosystems, they are cheaper and easy to use throughout the year (Bargagli et al., 2002; Adebisi & Oyediji, 2012; Sa'idu, 2015; Ojiodu & Olumayede, 2018; Ndlovu et al., 2019; Radziemska et al., 2019; Yushin et al., 2020). The analysis of metal content in mosses reflects a corresponding atmospheric metal deposition. Hence, this work was aimed at detecting the level of heavy metal pollution within the University of Lagos campus using moss as bioindicators.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Study Area

The survey was carried out at the University of Lagos, Akoka campus (6°31'0" N, 3°23'10" E), located on 802 acres of land in Akoka, the North-Eastern part of Yaba, Lagos State. It was a survey-type research based on primary data collection. This involved the stratification of the sample area. The four sample sites were selected based on the level of pollutants exposure, accessibility to the moss species as well as availability of open spaces. A control sampling was done in First Estate, Amuwo Odofin LGA; a strictly residential area with minimal vehicular traffic, commercial activities and alternative electricity sources. Georeferencing of the study sites was done using Garmin GPS MAP 76S. Detailed information on the sampling sites is provided in Fig. 1 and Table 1.

Description of Locations

1. **Faculty of Engineering (FE)** – A site with staff offices, lecture halls and laboratories. Located beside the main auditorium and adjacent to the senate building of the school. It is also at an intersection.
2. **Main Library (ML)** – A building for quiet study and work area for students and professionals located behind the senate building. Behind this building is a diesel power plant.
3. **Lagoon Front (LF)** – A noticeable spot for picnics, pictures and meditation surrounded by a large body of water and shops for business and commercial activities.
4. **Akintunde Ojo Library (AKT)** – A building for study and a work area for students. Beside this building is also a power plant.
5. **First Estate (C)** - A strictly residential area with little or no commercial activities. Behind it is a major busy highway.

Table 1
Sample location and characteristics

Location	Location site	Location	Coordinates
Faculty of Engineering (FE)	Soil	Faculty of Engineering (FE)	6° 31' 5" N, 3° 23' 58" E
Main Library (ML)	Bare rock	Main Library (ML)	6° 31' 11" N, 3° 23' 59" E
Lagoon front (LF)	Soil	Lagoon front (LF)	6° 31' 8" N, 3° 23' 58" E
Akintunde Ojo Library (AKT)	Bare rock	Akintunde Ojo Library (AKT)	6° 31' 10" N, 3° 24' 1" E
First Estate (CL)	Soil	Amuwo Odofin (C)	6° 28' 31.6" N, 3° 18' 18.7" E

Sample collection and identification

Samples of *M. hornum* (Plate 1) and surface soil were collected from the selected sites within the studied area at least 10 metres apart, from July to November 2019. Moss sample collection was carried out using a stainless-steel trowel and gently placed in a petri dish to prevent excessive heat and condensation. Samples were collected in triplicate, sealed with masking tape, labelled accordingly and transported to the laboratory for analysis. Georeferenced coordinates, as well as the date of the collection, were documented on the masking tape label on each collection. Collected moss samples were taken to the laboratory and identified by a bryologist at the University of Lagos.

Sample preparation and analysis

Moss samples were prepared for laboratory analysis by trimming the life-green portions of the total amount of moss harvested. The moss was dried in a thermostatic dry machine for 24 hrs at 40 °C to remove its excess moisture content and ground it into a homogenous powder. Mineralization of moss tissue was done by dissolving 1g of powdered moss into 10 ml of concentrated nitric acid (HNO₃) and digesting for 5 minutes. After mineralization, samples were left to cool to room temperature for one hour

and poured into 50 ml flasks and finally made up with distilled water (Baltreinaite et al. 2011). Determination of the level of heavy metal contamination was done using the Box Scientific Atomic Absorption Spectrometer at the University of Lagos Central Research Laboratory.

Statistical Analysis

The data for heavy metal accumulation in *M. hornum* were evaluated using descriptive analysis. Analysis of Variance was performed to deduce significant differences in the heavy metal concentration among the study areas. Statistical difference was established at $p < 0.05$. All analysis was done using IBM SPSS v. 27 (IBM Corp., NY, USA).

The anthropogenic influence of the pollutants on the environment was calculated using the contaminant factor and geo-accumulation index.

The contamination factor was calculated using this equation:

$$CF = \frac{C_{\text{moss}}}{C_{\text{background}}}$$

Where C_{moss} is the measured concentration of the metal in the plant sample in a sample site while $C_{\text{background}}$ is the plant samples collected from a clean site (control site). The scale for interpretation of results consisted of various categories according to the CF values as described by Jiang et al. (2018): C1 ($CF < 1$) indicating none contaminated; C2 ($CF: 1-2$) indicating contamination suspected; C3 ($CF: 2-3.5$) indicating slightly contaminated; C4 ($CF: 3.5-8$) indicating moderately contaminated; C5 ($CF: 8-27$) indicating seriously contaminated; C6 ($CF > 27$) indicating extremely contaminated.

The index of geo-accumulation, I_{geo} , was calculated using the following formula below:

$$I_{\text{geo}} = \frac{C_{\text{moss}}}{1.5C_{\text{background}}}$$

where $C_{\text{moss}}/C_{\text{background}}$ is the contamination factor. The factor of 1.5 is introduced to minimize the effect of possible variations in the background (Okedeyi et al., 2014). The scale for interpretation of results consisted of various categories according to the I_{geo} values as described by Yushin et al. (2020): $I_{\text{geo}} < 0$ no contamination ($I_{\text{geo}} 1$); 0–1 slightly polluted ($I_{\text{geo}} 2$); 1–2 moderately polluted ($I_{\text{geo}} 3$); 2–3 moderately to severely polluted ($I_{\text{geo}} 4$); 3–4 severely polluted ($I_{\text{geo}} 5$); 4–5 severely to extremely polluted ($I_{\text{geo}} 6$); and $I_{\text{geo}} > 5$ extremely polluted ($I_{\text{geo}} 7$).

RESULTS

Distribution of Heavy metal in samples found in locations evaluated

A total of nine heavy metals were found in all the moss plants analysed and varied from location to location. The highest heavy metal obtained in the study was iron, present in all the locations evaluated. This was followed by zinc while the least heavy metal concentration from locations varied. The concentration of heavy metals across the study locations revealed that all the examined metals were lowest at the CL except Ni which was lowest in FE and LF (0.03mg/kg). The concentration of Ni at CL was 0.07mg/kg. All the heavy metals were highest at AKT except Cr which was lowest at CL and AKT but highest at ML and LF. The concentration of Cu, Co, Mn, Fe and Zn was significantly different across the study locations (Fig. 2). These values are higher than the recommended limits of World Health Organization (WHO) and Federal Ministry of Environment (FME) threshold permissible levels of heavy metals with exception to Cr that is below 1.5mg/kg. Ni (0.03 ± 0.01 mg/kg) was the least heavy metal obtained at the FE location, Cd (0.00 ± 0.03 mg/kg) was found the least at the ML location, Co (0.03 ± 0.02 mg/kg) and Ni (0.03 ± 0.04 mg/kg) were observed least at LF location, while Cr (0.03 ± 0.02 mg/kg) was the least found at ATK location. While there was no significant difference in the concentrations of Cd, Co, Cr, Cu, Mn, Ni, and Pb among locations, Mn, Fe and Zn were significantly higher than the other heavy metals in all locations examined (Fig. 3).

Contaminant Factor

The contaminant factor (CF_{moss}) of each metal in the studied locations is summarized in Table 2. Results revealed that Cd (1.57mg/kg) and Ni (1.17mg/kg) are suspected contaminants in the campus and Co (3.06mg/kg) is in the slightly contaminated category. Cr (5.00 mg/kg) and Pb (4.09mg/kg) are in the moderately contaminated category while Cu (15.82mg/kg), Fe (17.69mg/kg), Mn (11.46mg/kg) and Zn (9.86mg/kg) are in the seriously contaminated category. In a comparison of these CF values with the different study locations, ML, FE and LF are moderately contaminated (C4 category) while AKT has a CF value in the C5 category, indicating serious contamination.

Index of Geo-accumulation

The I_{geo} results indicate different levels of contamination in the different study locations (Table 3). Cd (1.05mg/kg) and Ni (0.78mg/kg) are the least contaminants while Co (2.04mg/kg), Cr (3.33mg/kg) and Pb (2.72mg/kg) are moderately pollutants in the Akoka campus. Cu (10.55 mg/kg), Fe (11.80mg/kg), Mn (7.64mg/kg) and Zn (6.57mg/kg) are severe pollutants in the study locations. In comparison, the index of geo-accumulation of heavy metal pollution in the Akoka campus of the University of Lagos revealed that FE and ML are moderate to severely polluted, LF is severely polluted while AKT is extremely polluted with the determined elements

Table 2
Contamination factor (CF) and different categories of contamination (as defined by the mean CF) for each of the heavy metal

Metals (mg/kg)	FE	ML	LF	AKT	Mean CF	Category
Cadmium	1.48	0.00	2.59	2.22	1.57	C2
Cobalt	3.33	1.11	1.67	6.11	3.06	C3
Chromium	4.00	7.00	6.00	3.00	5.00	C4
Copper	5.17	2.93	5.17	50.00	15.82	C5
Iron	10.78	9.70	10.78	39.52	17.69	C5
Manganese	6.58	4.94	7.34	26.96	11.46	C5
Nickel	0.45	2.58	0.45	1.21	1.17	C2
Lead	3.65	4.29	2.06	6.35	4.09	C4
Zinc	3.85	3.78	7.37	24.43	9.86	C5
Mean CF	4.37	4.04	4.83	17.76	7.75	
Category	C4	C4	C4	C5		

KEY: Cd: cadmium, Co: cobalt, Cr: chromium, Cu: copper, Fe: iron, Mn: manganese, Ni: nickel, Pb: lead, Zn: zinc, FE: Faculty of Engineering, ML: Main Library, LF: Lagoon front, AKT: Akintunde Ojo library.

Table 3
Index of geo-accumulation values of the studied locations

Metals (mg/kg)	FE	ML	LF	AKT	Mean	Category
Cadmium	0.99	0.00	1.73	1.48	1.05	$I_{geo}2$
Cobalt	2.22	0.74	1.11	4.07	2.04	$I_{geo}3$
Chromium	2.67	4.67	4.00	2.00	3.33	$I_{geo}4$
Copper	3.45	1.95	3.45	33.33	10.55	$I_{geo}7$
Iron	7.19	6.47	7.19	26.35	11.80	$I_{geo}7$
Manganese	4.39	3.29	4.89	17.97	7.64	$I_{geo}7$
Nickel	0.30	1.72	0.30	0.81	0.78	$I_{geo}1$
Lead	2.43	2.86	1.38	4.23	2.72	$I_{geo}3$
Zinc	2.57	2.52	4.91	16.28	6.57	$I_{geo}7$
Mean	2.91	2.69	3.22	8.69	5.16	
Category	$I_{geo}4$	$I_{geo}4$	$I_{geo}5$	$I_{geo}7$		

KEY: Cd: cadmium, Co: cobalt, Cr: chromium, Cu: copper, Fe: iron, Mn: manganese, Ni: nickel, Pb: lead, Zn: zinc, FE: Faculty of Engineering, ML: Main Library, LF: Lagoon front, AKT: Akintunde Ojo library.

DISCUSSION

Some organisms are used as active or passive bioindicators for environmental stress, which might result from the exposure of such organisms to contaminants (Pesch & Schroeder, 2006). The presence or absence of some moss species can indicate the presence of certain pollutants. According to Cowden & Aherne (2019), specific moss presence or absence can indicate the presence of some pollutants. Certain species are highly pollutant prone, while others are immune.

This study explored the heavy metal pollution of the University of Lagos, Akoka campus using moss as a bioindicator. The study revealed that Fe, Mn and Zn were the most accumulated heavy metals in all the locations examined. The study also confirmed that the control location is a clean environment with low concentrations of heavy metals. In comparison with the locations surveyed, the University of Lagos Main Library and Lagoon Front locations were the least polluted site while the Akintunde Ojo Library site is the most polluted location within the Akoka campus. AKT had the highest concentration of all the metals excluding Ni and Cr This could be attributed to the diesel power plant fumes while metallurgical plants and machinery companies can emit Ni, Cu, Mo and W (Vergel et al., 2019). The Faculty of Engineering location had average contamination levels. These results clearly show the effect of some anthropogenic

activities such as emissions from industries, energy generation, vehicular traffic, combustion of fossil fuel amongst others on the quality of air in the atmosphere. Locations that have the highest rate of deposits either from a power plant or automobiles recorded a relatively high heavy metal deposit and vice versa. This result agrees with the work of Jiang et al. (2018) who reported that Huazhong Agricultural University (HZ) out of the five locations studied is the least polluted, as the campus was exposed to minimal anthropogenic emission, surrounded by clear lakes and green hills with high vegetation cover. This also confirms the higher accumulation capabilities of heavy metals by mosses as compared to tree leaves. These results are similar to previous studies by Graciela et al. (2013), Cowden et al. (2015), and Jiang et al. (2018), indicating that mosses accumulate heavy metals 4 to 51 times more than tree leaves. The concentrations of heavy metals recorded in this study is far greater than the recommended limits of World Health Organization (WHO) and Federal Ministry of Environment (FME) threshold permissible levels of heavy metals (Musa et al., 2017). This supports similar studies on heavy metal contamination around Lagos metropolis of the State (Ojiodu et al., 2016; Ojiodu & Olumayede 2018)

The use of geochemical indices such as contamination factor and geo-accumulation index is important for the assessment of the contamination status of an environment (Vergel et al., 2019; Rutkowski et al., 2020). The contamination factor (CF) helps to determine the contamination level of each metal in the location. The different categories of CF values indicate the level of pollutants in the environment. In this study, CF values ranged between C1 and C6 categories. Ni in LF, Co in ML, and Ni in LF were less than 1 indicating that these sites experienced no contamination. Suspected contamination of Cd, Co, and Ni was observed in all the study sites while other metals at contaminated at different levels. This supports Warri et al. (2015) who reported a then CF value of 2 indicates no contamination with As, Mn, Ni, and Cd, since CF is less than 2 as these metals can easily be obtained from natural variation (Vergel et al., 2019). A moderate contamination range of C4 was recorded for Cr, Mn, Zn, Pb and Cu in FE, LF and ML while Fe is the only extremely contaminated metal in these three study locations. The high CF of Cu, Fe, Mn and Zn in AKT shows extreme contamination. These results are at variance with Fernandez & Carballeria (2001) which indicated that Cu, Mn, Cd, Fe, Ni and Zn are associated with the C1 and C2 categories of contamination scales in Galicia North Spain. Vergel et al. (2019) reported that the CF value of heavy metals deposition in Moscow, Russia obtained for Pb indicates slightly moderate pollution supporting results of this study. The I_{geo} data are in good correlation with CF values depicting moderate to extreme pollution in the moss samples evaluated. It reiterated the pollution scales of the study locations, FE and ML of the Akoka campus are moderate to severely polluted, LF is severely polluted while AKT is extremely polluted.

In conclusion, this study has proven the efficacy of moss as an environmental pollution indicator. A high concentration of Fe, Zn and Mn were present in all locations. AKT had the highest concentration of all the metals excluding Ni and Cr. Based on the contamination assessment done in 2019 using CF and I_{geo} values, the selected sample locations of the University of Lagos, Akoka campus was characterized to be moderate to severely (FE, ML, LF) and extremely polluted (AKT).

Declarations

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Funding information

No funding was obtained for this study.

Availability of data and material

All data generated or analyzed during this study are included in this article.

Authors' contribution statement

All authors made contributions to the study design and concept. Aramide Igbari wrote the first draft of manuscript and validated the data. The data analysis, review and manuscript editing was done by Oluwafemi Amusa. Material preparation and data collection was performed by Divine Orisejor. Project supervision, administration and manuscript edition were performed by Oluwatoyin Ogundipe.

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Plate

Plate 1 is available in the Supplementary Files section.

Figures

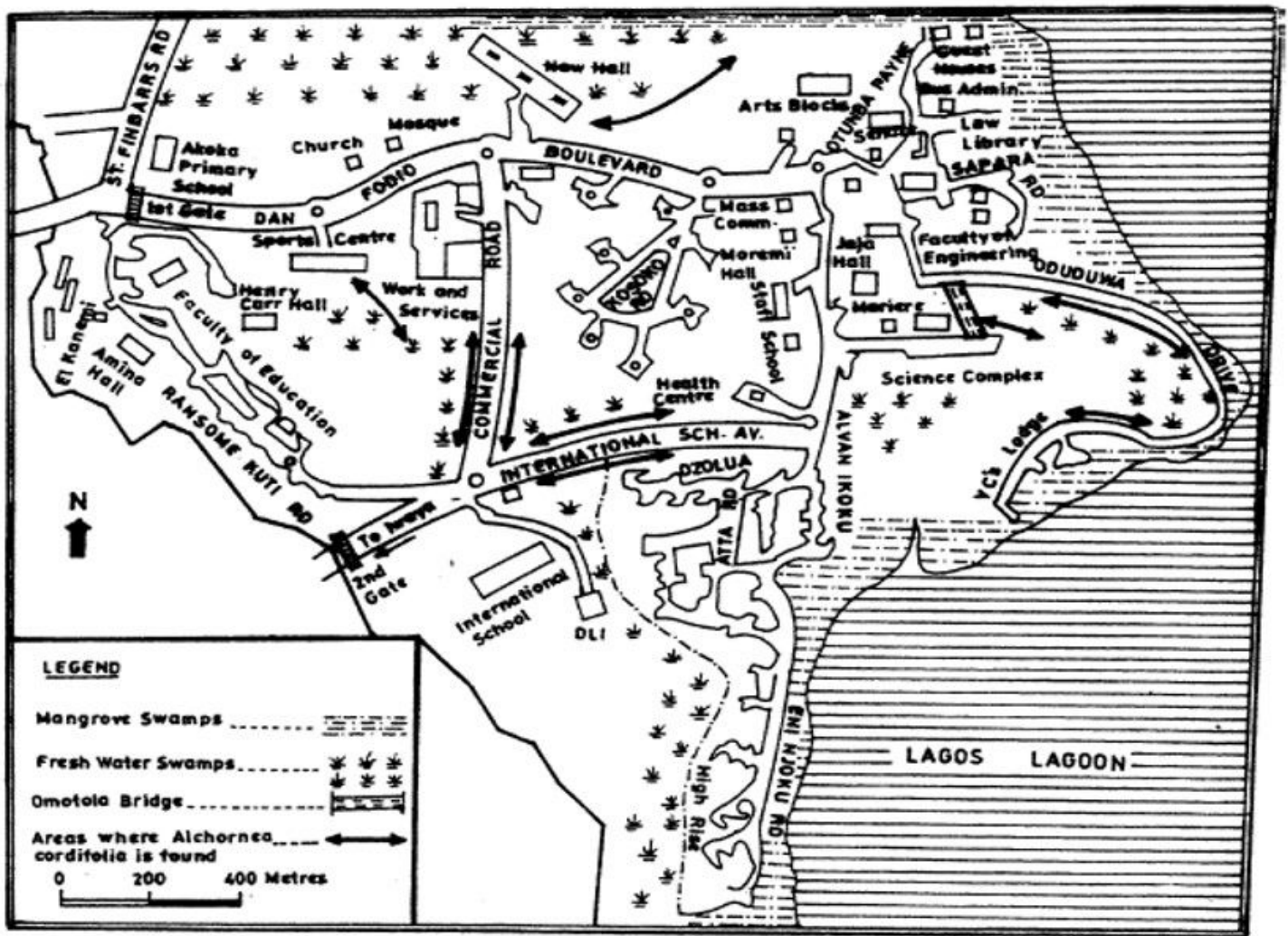


Figure 1

Map of the University of Lagos; location and sampling sites; A= Location of research, Δ= Sampling sites

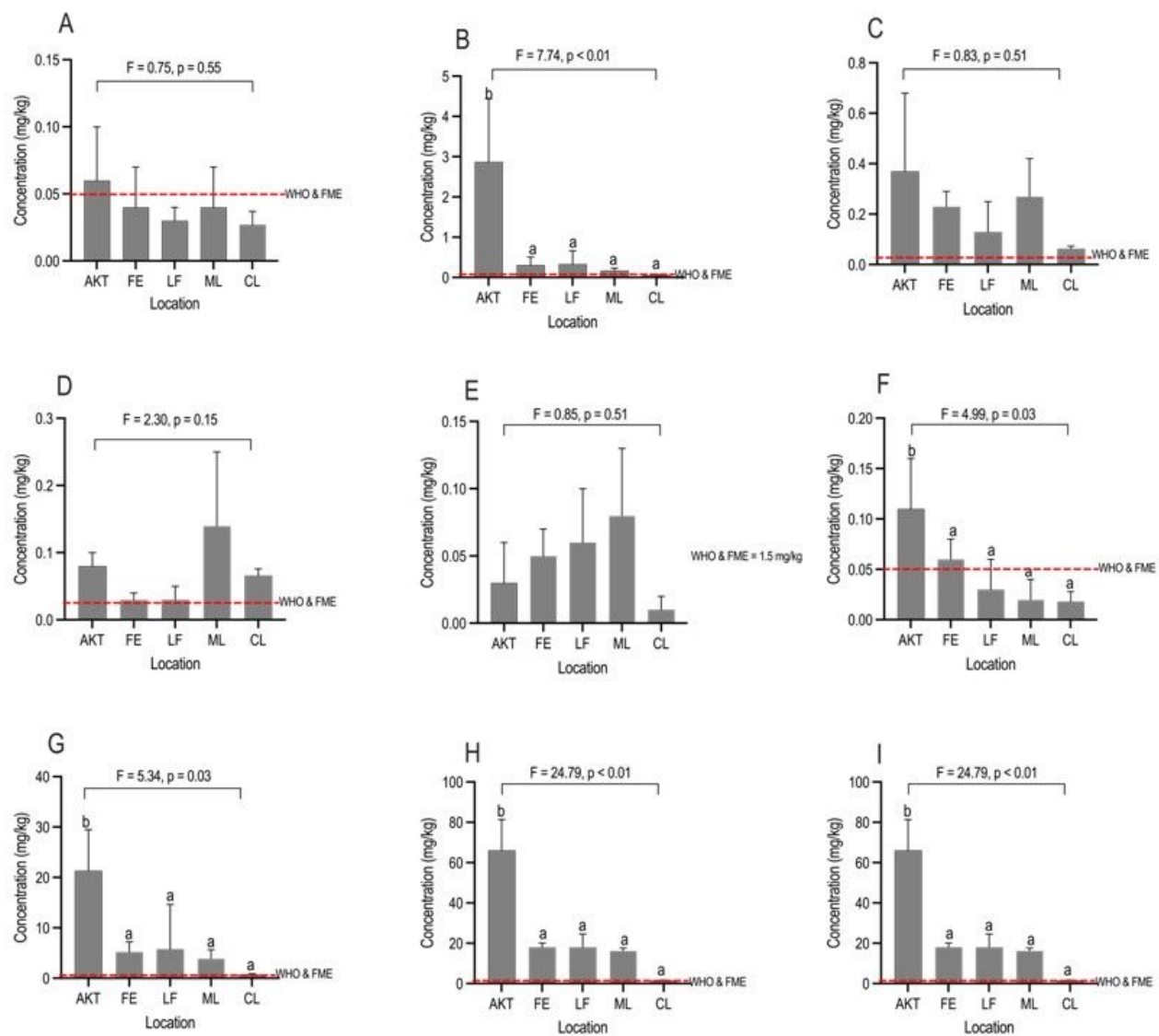


Figure 2

Concentration of heavy metals in mosses across the collection sites against control location (A) Cadmium (B) Copper (C) Lead (D) Nickel (E) Chromium (F) Cobalt (G) Manganese (H) Iron (I) Zinc. The locations are AKT, FE, LF, ML, CL: control location

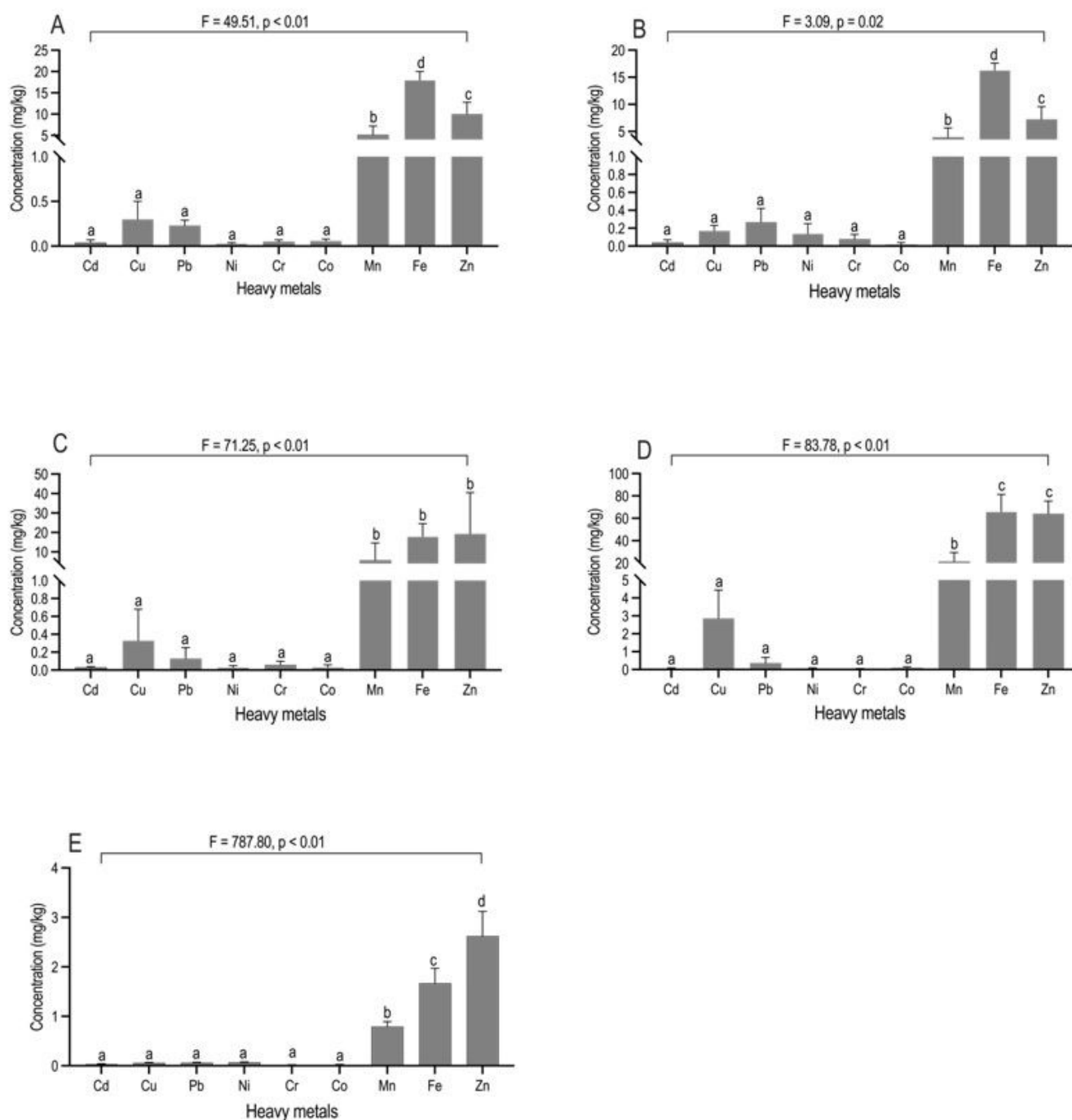


Figure 3

A comparison of heavy metals within study locations (A) FE (B) ML (C) LF (D) AKT (E) CL: control location; Cd: Cadmium; Cu: Copper; Pb: Lead; Ni: Nickel; Cr: Chromium; Co: Cobalt; Mn: Manganese; Fe: Iron; Zn: Zinc

Supplementary Files

This is a list of supplementary files associated with this preprint. Click to download.

- [Plate1.docx](#)