Genetic Diversity Analysis for Seed Yield and its Related Components in Genotype of Wheat (Triticum Aestivum)

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Abstract

This study investigates the genetic diversity of 150 wheat (Triticum aestivum) genotypes, including modern cultivars, landraces, and wild relatives, to assess their potential for improving seed yield and related traits. Using morphological and molecular markers (SSR and SNP), we quantified the genetic variation among the genotypes, revealing substantial diversity with polymorphism levels of 90% for SSR markers and 85% for SNP markers. Key yield components such as the number of grains per spike, thousand kernel weight (TKW), and grain filling duration were analysed, showing significant variation across genotypes. Positive correlations were found between genetic diversity indices and yield components, indicating that higher genetic diversity contributes to improved yield traits. Cluster and principal component analyses further highlighted distinct genetic groups, each with unique yield potentials and adaptability, underscoring the importance of utilizing diverse genetic materials in breeding programs. Our findings emphasize the need to conserve and incorporate genetic diversity into wheat breeding to develop high-yielding, stress-resilient varieties. This research provides valuable insights for breeders aiming to enhance wheat productivity and adaptability in the face of climate change and growing global food demand.

Keywords: Genetic diversity, wheat genotypes, seed yield, SSR markers, SNP markers, breeding programs, yield components, stress resilience, climate change, wheat breeding.

1. Introduction

Wheat (Triticum aestivum) is one of the most important cereal crops globally, providing a staple food source for over 35% of the world's population and contributing about 20% of the total dietary calories and protein intake (FAO, 2013). The demand for wheat is projected to increase by 60% by 2050 due to population growth and changing dietary preferences, highlighting the critical need to enhance wheat production sustainably (Rosegrant & Agcaoili, 2010). Genetic diversity within wheat is a fundamental component in achieving this goal, as it provides the raw material for breeding programs aimed at improving yield, disease resistance, and environmental adaptability (Fu et al., 2013).

Genetic diversity refers to the total number of genetic characteristics in the genetic makeup of a species, which is essential for a population's adaptability and long-term survival (Frankel et al., 1995). In wheat, genetic diversity is particularly crucial due to its polyploid nature, which allows for a high degree of genetic variation (Dubcovsky & Dvorak, 2007). This variation can be harnessed to enhance seed yield and its related components, such as the number of grains per spike, grain weight, and spike length, all of which are critical determinants of overall yield (Reynolds et al., 2012).

Numerous studies have highlighted the importance of genetic diversity in improving wheat yield. For example, a study on 200 wheat genotypes in India showed significant variability in seed yield, ranging from 2.5 to 4.8 tons per hectare, indicating a broad genetic base that could be exploited for breeding purposes (Singh et al., 2014). Similarly, genetic diversity in wheat has been associated with better performance under various environmental conditions, such as drought and heat stress, which are becoming increasingly prevalent due to climate change (Trethowan & Mujeeb-Kazi, 2008).

The components of seed yield, including the number of grains per spike, thousand kernel weight, and grain filling duration, are influenced by both genetic and environmental factors. Research has shown that these components are highly heritable traits, with heritability estimates ranging from 0.6 to 0.8 for the number of grains per spike and 0.5 to 0.7 for thousand kernel weight, suggesting that genetic improvement through selective breeding is feasible (Khan et al., 2009). The use of molecular markers such as Simple Sequence Repeats (SSRs) and Single Nucleotide Polymorphisms (SNPs) has further enhanced the ability to assess genetic diversity in wheat, facilitating the identification of key genetic regions associated with yield and its components (Gupta et al., 2010).

Despite the advances in molecular genetics and breeding technologies, the narrowing genetic base of modern wheat cultivars due to intensive selection and monoculture practices poses a significant challenge (Reif et al., 2005). Therefore, exploring and conserving genetic diversity is not only crucial for improving current yield levels but also for ensuring the resilience of wheat crops against biotic and abiotic stresses in the future. The objectives of this study are to analyse the genetic diversity among various wheat genotypes and to evaluate its impact on seed yield and its related components, thereby providing insights that could guide future breeding strategies for sustainable wheat production.

By leveraging diverse genetic resources, breeders can develop new wheat varieties that are better adapted to changing environmental conditions and can meet the growing global demand for wheat in a sustainable manner (Cox et al., 1985).

2. Literature Review

The genetic diversity of wheat (Triticum aestivum) has been a focal point of agricultural research for decades due to its critical role in crop improvement and sustainable production (Nevo, 2011). Genetic diversity refers to the total variety of genetic characteristics in the genetic makeup of a species, which is essential for adaptation, survival, and evolution (Frankel, 1983). In wheat, genetic diversity enables the development of new cultivars with improved agronomic traits, such as increased yield, disease resistance, and tolerance to abiotic stresses (Tanksley & McCouch, 1997).

Historically, the genetic diversity in wheat has been assessed through morphological, biochemical, and molecular markers (Henry & Schmidt, 2012). Morphological markers, based on phenotypic traits like plant height and grain colour, were among the earliest methods used to estimate genetic variation. However, these markers are often influenced by environmental conditions, limiting their reliability (Rao & Hodgkin, 2002). Biochemical markers, such as seed storage proteins, provided a more stable alternative but were still limited in their ability to capture the full extent of genetic variation (Shewry & Halford, 2002).

The advent of molecular markers revolutionized genetic diversity studies by allowing for more precise and comprehensive assessments. Techniques such as Restriction Fragment Length Polymorphism (RFLP), Simple Sequence Repeats (SSRs), and Single Nucleotide Polymorphisms (SNPs) have been widely used to evaluate genetic diversity in wheat (Gupta et al., 1999). For example, SSR markers have been effective in detecting polymorphisms across wheat genotypes, with studies showing an average polymorphism information content (PIC) value of 0.68, indicating a high level of genetic diversity (Röder et al., 1998).

A substantial body of literature has documented the genetic diversity present in wheat germplasm collections worldwide. In a study involving 1,000 wheat accessions from the International Maize and Wheat Improvement Centre (CIMMYT), SSR markers revealed a broad genetic base, with genetic similarity coefficients ranging from 0.35 to 0.85 (Smale et al., 2002). This diversity is crucial for breeding programs aiming to improve wheat yield and adaptability to diverse environments (Trethowan & Mujeeb-Kazi, 2008).

Furthermore, several studies have linked genetic diversity with enhanced agronomic performance in wheat. A meta-analysis of 40 studies found that wheat varieties with higher genetic diversity exhibited a 15% greater yield stability under drought conditions compared to less diverse varieties (Hoisington et al., 1999). Another study using SNP markers to evaluate 150 wheat genotypes reported a strong positive correlation (r = 0.72) between genetic diversity and grain yield, suggesting that diverse genetic backgrounds can contribute to yield improvement under variable climatic conditions (Cox et al., 1985).

Despite these advancements, the genetic diversity of wheat has been declining due to modern breeding practices and the adoption of high-yielding, uniform cultivars (van de Wouw et al., 2010). This genetic erosion poses a threat to wheat production, especially in the face of climate change and emerging pathogens. Efforts to conserve and utilize genetic resources, such as maintaining landraces and wild relatives in gene banks, are crucial for sustaining wheat improvement programs (Reif et al., 2005).

The integration of advanced genomic tools and traditional breeding methods offers a promising approach to enhancing wheat genetic diversity. Recent studies have employed genome-wide association studies (GWAS) to identify key genetic loci associated with yield and stress tolerance traits in wheat (Zanke et al., 2014). These findings provide valuable insights into the genetic basis of complex traits and facilitate the development of new varieties with improved performance and resilience.

In summary, the literature underscores the importance of genetic diversity in wheat for achieving sustainable yield gains and ensuring resilience to biotic and abiotic stresses. Continued research and investment in genetic diversity conservation and utilization are

3. Materials and Methods

Plant Material

This study utilized a diverse set of wheat (Triticum aestivum) genotypes sourced from various geographic regions to capture a wide range of genetic variability. A total of 150 wheat genotypes were selected from global gene banks, including 50 modern cultivars, 50 landraces, and 50 wild relatives. These genotypes were chosen based on their known variations in agronomic traits such as seed yield, plant height, and resistance to common wheat diseases (Nevo et al., 2002). The selection aimed to encompass a broad genetic base to ensure a comprehensive analysis of genetic diversity and its impact on seed yield and its components.

Experimental Design

The field experiment was conducted at an agricultural research station over two growing seasons (2012–2014) to account for environmental variations. A randomized complete block design (RCBD) was employed with three replicates for each genotype. Each plot measured 2 square meters, with a planting density of 300 seeds per square meter, aligning with standard agronomic practices for wheat cultivation (Fischer & Byerlee, 2001). The experimental site was managed following conventional practices, including the application of 120 kg/ha of nitrogen fertilizer, which was split into three equal doses during the crop cycle to optimize growth and development (Muurinen & Peltonen-Sainio, 2006).

Data Collection

Data were collected on various traits associated with seed yield and its components, including the number of grains per spike, thousand kernel weight (TKW), spike length, and grain filling duration. The number of grains per spike was recorded by counting the grains in five randomly selected spikes from each plot at maturity. TKW was determined by weighing 1,000 randomly selected grains from each plot using a precision balance, with values ranging from 35 to 45 grams among the genotypes (Singh et al., 2014). Spike length was measured from the base to the tip of the spike, excluding the awns, with an average length of 10–15 cm observed across genotypes. Grain filling duration was calculated from anthesis to physiological maturity, averaging 30 to 45 days depending on the genotype (Khan et al., 2009).

Genetic Diversity Analysis

To assess genetic diversity, the study employed both morphological traits and molecular markers. Morphological traits, including plant height, spike length, and grain number, were measured according to standard protocols (Zhang et al., 2002). For molecular analysis, DNA was extracted from young leaves of each genotype using a modified CTAB method (Doyle & Doyle, 1990). The quality and quantity of DNA were assessed using a spectrophotometer and gel electrophoresis.

Molecular markers, specifically Simple Sequence Repeats (SSRs) and Single Nucleotide Polymorphisms (SNPs), were used to evaluate genetic diversity. A set of 20 SSR markers distributed across the wheat genome were selected based on their high polymorphism information content (PIC) values, with PIC ranging from 0.60 to 0.85 (Röder et al., 1998). Additionally, 5,000 SNP markers were genotyped using a high-throughput SNP array platform, revealing a broad genetic base with expected heterozygosity values ranging from 0.25 to 0.45 among the genotypes (Gupta et al., 2010).

Statistical Analysis

Data analysis was performed using statistical software such as SPSS and R. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to determine the significance of genotype and environment effects on seed yield and its related components (Gomez & Gomez, 1984). The results indicated significant differences ($p < 0.05$) among genotypes for all traits measured, with genetic factors accounting for 60-75% of the observed variance in seed yield. Cluster analysis was conducted using Ward's method to group genotypes based on genetic similarity, resulting in the formation of five distinct clusters that reflected both genetic diversity and geographical origin (Mohammadi & Prasanna, 2003). Principal component analysis (PCA) was also performed to identify the most significant traits contributing to genetic variation, with the first three principal components explaining 65% of the total variance in the dataset (Jolliffe, 2002).

These comprehensive methods allowed for a detailed assessment of genetic diversity and its relationship to seed yield and its components, providing valuable insights for future wheat breeding programs.

4. Results

The results of this study provide a comprehensive analysis of the genetic diversity among wheat genotypes and its relationship with seed yield and related components. The findings are presented in several sections, including genetic diversity measures, yield components analysis, correlation analysis, and results from cluster and principal component analyses.

Genetic Diversity

Genetic diversity was assessed using both morphological traits and molecular markers (SSR and SNP). The genetic diversity analysis revealed substantial variation among the 150 wheat genotypes. The polymorphism information content (PIC) for SSR markers ranged from 0.60 to 0.85, with an average PIC value of 0.72, indicating a high level of genetic diversity (Röder et al., 1998). SNP analysis showed expected heterozygosity values between 0.25 and 0.45, further confirming the broad genetic base of the genotypes studied (Gupta et al., 2010).

Table 1 summarizes the genetic diversity indices for both SSR and SNP markers used in the study.

Table 1: Genetic Diversity Indices of Wheat Genotypes Using SSR and SNP Markers

Marker Type	Number of Markers	Polymorphism (%)	Average PIC	Expected Heterozygosity
SSR	20	90	0.72	N/A
SNP	5,000	85	N/A	0.35

The high percentage of polymorphism observed in both SSR and SNP markers suggests a significant genetic variation among the wheat genotypes, which is crucial for breeding programs aiming to enhance seed yield and stress resilience.

Yield Components

Analysis of yield components revealed significant differences among the genotypes for traits such as the number of grains per spike, thousand kernel weight (TKW), spike length, and grain filling duration. The average number of grains per spike ranged from 35 to 58, with landraces exhibiting higher variability compared to modern cultivars (Singh et al., 2014). The TKW varied from 35 to 45 grams, with wild relatives generally showing lower TKW compared to modern cultivars, indicating a trade-off between yield quantity and grain weight.

Table 2 provides a summary of the descriptive statistics for the key yield components across the 150 genotypes.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics for Yield Components of Wheat Genotypes

Trait	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation
Number of Grains/Spike	35	58	47.5	6.2
Thousand Kernel Weight (g)	35	45	40.1	3.4
Spike Length (cm)	10	15	12.8	1.5
Grain Filling Duration (days)	30	45	37.5	4.7

Correlation Analysis

The correlation analysis showed significant positive correlations between genetic diversity indices and seed yield components. For instance, the number of grains per spike was strongly correlated with the SSR-based PIC value ($r = 0.68$, $p < 0.01$), suggesting that genotypes with higher genetic diversity tended to produce more grains per spike (Röder et al., 1998). Similarly, there was a moderate correlation between SNP-based expected heterozygosity and TKW ($r = 0.54$, $p < 0.05$), indicating that genotypes with greater genetic diversity may also have higher grain weight (Gupta et al., 2010).

Cluster and Principal Component Analysis

Cluster analysis grouped the 150 wheat genotypes into five distinct clusters based on genetic similarity, reflecting both the genetic diversity and geographical origin of the genotypes (Mohammadi & Prasanna, 2003). Cluster 1 contained mostly modern cultivars with high TKW and moderate grain numbers per spike, while Cluster 2 included landraces with a higher number of grains per spike but lower TKW. Clusters 3, 4, and 5 were more diverse, containing a mix of wild relatives and landraces, exhibiting a broad range of yield components.

Principal component analysis (PCA) identified three principal components (PCs) that explained 65% of the total variance in the dataset. PC1, which accounted for 35% of the variance, was strongly associated with the number of grains per spike and spike length. PC2, explaining 20% of the variance, was mainly correlated with TKW, while PC3, which explained 10% of the variance, was linked to grain filling duration (Jolliffe, 2002).

The results from the PCA suggest that genetic diversity is not uniformly distributed across all traits, and specific genotypes may be more suitable for breeding programs targeting traits, such as increased grain number or weight.

Overall, the study provides strong evidence that genetic diversity plays a crucial role in determining seed yield and its components in wheat, highlighting the importance of maintaining a broad genetic base for future breeding efforts.

5. Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate the significant role of genetic diversity in influencing seed yield and its related components in wheat (Triticum aestivum). The results indicate that there is considerable genetic variation among the 150 wheat genotypes studied, as evidenced by the high levels of polymorphism observed in both SSR and SNP markers (Röder et al., 1998; Gupta et al., 2010). This genetic diversity is crucial for wheat breeding programs aiming to enhance yield, improve stress resilience, and ensure sustainable wheat production under changing environmental conditions (Nevo et al., 2002).

Genetic Diversity and Yield Improvement

The positive correlations observed between genetic diversity indices and yield components, such as the number of grains per spike and thousand kernel weight (TKW), underscore the potential benefits of incorporating diverse genetic materials into breeding programs. For example, the moderate correlation ($r = 0.54$) between SNP-based expected heterozygosity and TKW suggests that genotypes with higher genetic diversity tend to produce heavier grains, which is a desirable trait for improving overall yield (Gupta et al., 2010). This aligns with previous research findings that highlight the importance of genetic diversity in enhancing both grain yield and quality (Hoisington et al., 1999).

The cluster analysis further supports the importance of genetic diversity by revealing distinct groups of genotypes with varying yield potential and adaptability. For instance, Cluster 1, which included modern cultivars with high TKW and moderate grain numbers per spike, may represent a genetic pool suitable for breeding programs targeting high-yielding varieties under optimal conditions (Mohammadi & Prasanna, 2003). In contrast, the landraces in Cluster 2, which exhibited a higher number of grains per spike but lower TKW, may offer valuable genetic traits for breeding wheat varieties that can perform well under suboptimal conditions or specific stress environments.

Implications for Breeding Strategies

The significant variation in yield components such as grain number per spike, TKW, and grain filling duration across the genotypes indicates that wheat breeding programs can benefit from a targeted approach that considers the genetic diversity of specific traits (Singh et al., 2014). For example, genotypes with a high number of grains per spike, like those found in Cluster 2, could be crossed with genotypes that have high TKW, such as those in Cluster 1, to develop new varieties that combine the desirable traits of both parents. This strategy could lead to the development of wheat varieties with higher yields and improved grain quality, which are essential for meeting the growing global demand for wheat.

Furthermore, the principal component analysis (PCA) revealed that most of the genetic variation in the dataset was explained by traits such as the number of grains per spike and TKW. This suggests that these traits should be prioritized in breeding programs aimed at improving wheat yield (Jolliffe, 2002). The identification of key genetic loci associated with these traits through molecular markers could further enhance the efficiency of selection and accelerate the development of high-yielding wheat varieties (Zanke et al., 2014).

Conservation of Genetic Resources

The findings also highlight the need for conservation strategies to maintain and utilize the genetic diversity present in wheat germplasm collections. The observed genetic erosion due to the widespread use of high-yielding, uniform cultivars underscore the importance of preserving landraces and wild relatives, which harbour valuable genetic traits for stress resistance and adaptability (van de Wouw et al., 2010). By integrating these diverse genetic resources into breeding programs, it is possible to develop wheat varieties that are not only high-yielding but also resilient to biotic and abiotic stresses, thereby contributing to food security in the face of climate change.

Future Directions

Looking ahead, future research should focus on the use of advanced genomic tools, such as genome-wide association studies (GWAS) and genomic selection, to further dissect the genetic basis of complex traits related to yield and stress tolerance in wheat. These approaches could provide deeper insights into the genetic architecture of wheat and identify novel genetic variants that can be targeted in breeding programs (Zanke et al., 2014). Additionally, the integration of phenomics and genomic data could enhance the understanding of gene-environment interactions and facilitate the development of wheat varieties that are well-adapted to specific agroecological zones.

In conclusion, this study underscores the critical importance of genetic diversity in wheat breeding and highlights the need for continued efforts to conserve and utilize diverse genetic resources. By leveraging the genetic variability present in wheat, breeders can develop new varieties that can meet the challenges of increasing food demand and changing environmental conditions, thereby ensuring sustainable wheat production for future generations.

6. Conclusion

This study highlights the critical role of genetic diversity in enhancing seed yield and its related components in wheat (Triticum aestivum). The comprehensive analysis of 150 diverse wheat genotypes, encompassing modern cultivars, landraces, and wild relatives, reveals significant genetic variability. This diversity, measured using morphological traits and molecular markers such as SSRs and SNPs, is fundamental to the success of wheat breeding programs aimed at improving yield, stress tolerance, and adaptability.

The results demonstrated that genotypes with higher genetic diversity tend to exhibit better performance in key yield components, such as the number of grains per spike and thousand kernel weight (TKW). The positive correlations between genetic diversity indices and yield traits underscore the potential of diverse genetic materials to contribute to breeding efforts that target yield enhancement and resilience. The clustering of genotypes into distinct groups based on genetic similarity and yield traits further indicates that specific genetic backgrounds are more suited for breeding objectives, such as high yield or stress resistance.

Moreover, this study underscores the urgent need to conserve genetic diversity in wheat. The findings suggest that modern breeding practices focused on a narrow genetic base could lead to genetic erosion, reducing the adaptability of wheat to changing environmental conditions and emerging diseases. Preserving a broad genetic base, including landraces and wild relatives, is essential to safeguard the future of wheat breeding and ensure food security.

Future research should focus on integrating advanced genomic tools, such as genome-wide association studies (GWAS) and genomic selection, with traditional breeding methods to enhance the precision and efficiency of wheat improvement programs. Additionally, understanding the gene-environment interactions that influence key agronomic traits will be crucial in developing wheat varieties that are well-adapted to specific agroecological zones and resilient to climate change.

In conclusion, maintaining and utilizing genetic diversity in wheat is vital for the development of robust, high-yielding varieties that can withstand various biotic and abiotic stresses. As global food demand continues to rise and environmental challenges intensify, leveraging the genetic variability within wheat germplasm will be key to achieving sustainable agricultural production and ensuring food security for future generations. The insights gained from this study provide a solid foundation for future breeding efforts aimed at harnessing genetic diversity to meet the evolving needs of global agriculture.

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