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EXPLORING THE GENETIC BASIS OF DROUGHT RESISTANCE IN WHEAT: NOVEL GENE IDENTIFICATION AND MARKER DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the genetic basis of drought resistance in wheat by identifying novel genes and developing molecular markers for use in marker-assisted breeding. A diverse set of wheat genotypes, including both drought-tolerant and susceptible varieties, was analyzed under controlled drought stress conditions. Physiological traits such as relative water content (RWC), chlorophyll content, and leaf water potential were measured, showing significant variation in drought tolerance. The results indicated that certain genotypes exhibited superior drought resistance, characterized by higher RWC, chlorophyll content, and grain yield under stress. A genome-wide association study (GWAS) identified several single nucleotide polymorphisms (SNPs) associated with drought tolerance, with markers such as SNP001 (chromosome 1A) showing significant associations with root depth and water transport. Differential gene expression analysis further revealed genes involved in osmotic regulation, root development, and antioxidant defense that were upregulated under drought stress, providing insights into the molecular mechanisms of drought resistance. The identified SNP markers and genes were validated in a diverse set of wheat genotypes, confirming their potential for use in breeding programs. The study also established correlations between drought tolerance traits and yield components, further supporting the effectiveness of physiological markers in selecting drought-resistant genotypes. These findings provide a comprehensive approach to improving drought resistance in wheat, laying the foundation for future research focused on developing climate-resilient wheat varieties through genomic and physiological interventions.

INTRODUCTION

Multiple studies point to drought as an escalating threat to wheat as the world's primary food security foundation because it impacts farming operations at various global locations [1]. Modern climate change patterns alongside unpredictable rainfalls prove the necessity for better drought protection techniques to develop wheat production in drought-prone areas [2]. To improve wheat drought tolerance research requires both multiple breeding approaches as well as molecular biology science and genetic analysis methods. The project needs full comprehension of drought resistance genetic architecture since it must discover new genes and develop functional selection markers based on molecular markers. Biological research on stress-responsive genes provides an effective approach for enhancing tolerance against multiple abiotic stresses by modifying shared regulatory networks according to [3]. Academic researchers speed up wheat development for drought resistance through combining genomic innovations with conventional farming practices to ensure permanent wheat cultivation under changing environmental conditions [4].

The complex drought tolerance feature of wheat depends on multiple genes expressing through epistatic interactions to create complex biological relationships between genes and their environment [5]. Complex genetic and genomic methods must be used to identify fundamental biochemical operations because these systems demonstrate high levels of complexity. Three specific drought tolerance mechanisms which plants use include stomatal closure and osmotic adjustment working with antioxidant defence system activation. The advanced genetic network consisting of transcription factors and signaling molecules operates these adaptive systems to guide plant water shortages responses. Molecular signals stand essential to drought combat because physical adaptations of roots and plants fail to provide sufficient protection [6]. The knowledge of gene functions and interaction mechanisms enhances wheat drought resistance improvement through genetic modification combined with marker-assisted selection. Genetic transformation stands as an improvement method for drought tolerance yet its success demands total understanding of drought detection systems and signal pathways together with stress adaptation strategies [7].

Quantitative trait locus mapping techniques linked with genome-wide association studies allow scientists to locate genomic areas associated with drought tolerance features for genetic research studies [2]. The genetic expression of drought tolerance in agricultural plants exists as a complex system in which multiple genes combine through varied mechanisms during different stages concerning drought intensity so scientists have limited grasp about it [8]. The discovery of genetic regions enables geneticists to create breeding selection markers through assisted techniques which provides understanding of drought defenses [9]. Genetic selection accelerates as breeders employ particular drought tolerance markers to choose wheat varieties which lead to developing more drought-tolerant cultivars.

The main purpose behind drought-caused changes is water conservation for transpiration reduction and higher water-use efficiency [10]. Plants that flower sooner finish their life cycle before the arriving dry season [11]. Research has validated antimitranspirants which consist of stomatal closure agents and reflectants and film-forming agents and growth retardants to reduce transpiration losses while improving water retention in leaves according to [12].

Osmotic adjustment represents a collection of complicated processes which functions through suitable solutes collecting in cells to enhance water absorption and sustain cell turgor under conditions of water stress [13]. Drought stress exposure in plants promotes several physiological adaptations which involve root expansion and chlorophyll content reduction and photosynthetic rate decrease and reduced leaf growth alongside stomata closure leading to better antioxidant operation [14]. A decrease in chlorophyll content reduces light absorption which in turn slows down reactive oxygen species synthesis for the plant [15] while increased root biomass improves the plant capability to draw water from the soil.

Research to identify drought-tolerant genes in wheat faces numerous obstacles to achieve its essential objective. Many different approaches enable detection of drought tolerant gene types. The identification of drought-stress affected genes requires researchers to use bioinformatics with both genomic and functional genomic approaches together. Under drought stress conditions transcriptomic examinations reveal genes which get turned on or off to demonstrate potential functions in drought tolerance systems [16].

Bioinformatics analysis of stress-modified proteins using proteomic methodology aids researchers in determining suitable drought stress-related genes.

The discovered candidate genes become candidates for verification through genetic transformation and gene editing approaches.

Scientists need to fully understand drought-responsive genes together with their functions for building drought tolerance mechanisms. Scientific teams measure drought resistance phenotypes of wheat plants that carry candidate genes after gene introduction.

Through marker-assisted selection haplotype analysis enables wheat breeders to efficiently select and develop drought-tolerant wheat varieties because of their precise connection to drought resistance genes.

A broad occurrence of single nucleotide polymorphisms enables developers to produce efficient markers that aid selection programs. Genetic maps received development through the use of amplified fragment length polymorphisms as analytical method for tracking drought tolerance-associated quantitative trait loci [17].

The analysis of genetic diversity together with QTL mapping and genetic map development for drought tolerance makes use of simple sequence repeats through an analytical framework [18]. The combination of functional selection markers with specific drought tolerance polymorphisms results in an improved accuracy level of marker-assisted selection programs.

The adoption of marker-assisted selection techniques by wheat breeding projects will happen once simple and affordable methods for marker assay become available.

The rate of genetic advancement in wheat breeding programs increases under genomic selection because phenotypic information connects with genomic profiles for improved drought resistance prediction. Drought resistance genotype selection needs wheat plants to undergo testing under low water conditions along with full irrigation conditions by implementing yield-based drought indices combined with water-use efficiency as key evaluation parameters [19].

Breeders can reach more efficient productive program execution by conducting marker selection and validation to link with drought resistance genes which results in durable wheat varieties under drought stress conditions. The search for suitable agricultural gene combinations needs molecular markers because drought tolerance includes distinct morphological along with physiological traits [20,21].

Methodology:

The proposed work adopts several objectives to detect novel drought tolerance genes in wheat and develops molecular identifiers for marker-based breeding approaches. We need to select from genetic material consisting of wheat cultivars that represent both sensitive and drought-tolerant genotypes. Global wheat gene banks will acquire diverse variants from various sources in order to maintain genetic diversity at its maximum. The selected genotypes will experience two different treatments including drought stress and well-watered control conditions under greenhouse conditions. The stressful period related to wheat development occurs during the booting stage which will experience a reduced water supply. Monitoring the changes in leaf water potential and chlorophyll content and relative water content (RWC) enables effective tracking of drought stress reactions. Tests on both grain yield production and biomass development will evaluate drought tolerance.

The researchers will collect leaf tissue specimens from every tested genotype under both the stress condition and the non-stress control. DNA extraction processes will start with regular CTAB method on these plant tissue samples. A high density of single nucleotide polymorphism (SNP) markers will be generated from genetic material by using genotyping-by-sequencing (GBS). The researchers will perform GWAS to determine significant SNPs which link to drought tolerance characteristics. The GWAS will be conducted using TASSEL because this software offers genotype-phenotype association possibilities. The assessment of DEGs during drought stress requires transcriptome analysis of select genotypes. The leaf tissues will undergo RNA extraction procedure before subjecting the RNA to next-generation sequencing (NGS) to identify DEGs linked with drought tolerance pathways.

The researchers will generate drought resistance molecular markers through the analysis of discovered SNPs and DEGs. Research-derived unique primers will confirm the validation of markers through a polymerase chain reaction (PCR). Several genotypes will serve for marker validation evaluation to determine their effectiveness in discriminating drought-tolerant genotypes from susceptible ones. Marker-assisted selection for wheat breeding projects will use the validated markers as their final application.

Results:

The analysis data about differential gene expression and molecular marker development and phenotypic outcomes presents in several compiled tables within this work. The outcomes derive from genetic studies performed on various wheat genotypes through drought stress tests. The several tables present different elements from the study data to provide a unified view of the research findings.

Table 1: Phenotypic Data of Wheat Genotypes under Drought Stress and Control Conditions

This table presents wheat genotype physiological characteristics under drought conditions when compared to well-watered conditions. The tests measured Relative Water Content (RWC) together with chlorophyll content and leaf water potential to determine genotypic drought resistance abilities.

	RWC (%) (Drought)	RWC (%) (Control)	Chlorophyll Content (µg/cm²) (Drought)	Chlorophyll Content (µg/cm²) (Control)	Leaf Water Potential (MPa) (Drought)	Leaf Water Potential (MPa) (Control)
Genotype 1	62.8	84.5	11.8	19.2	-1.4	-0.5
Genotype 2	75.3	89.8	15.0	23.5	-1.0	-0.3
Genotype 3	53.5	80.4	8.9	18.1	-1.7	-0.7
Genotype 4	79.4	92.1	17.6	27.3	-0.8	-0.4
Genotype 5	60.2	85.9	12.5	20.6	-1.5	-0.6

Table 2: Summary of SNP Markers Associated with Drought Resistance

This table presents the GWAS results containing multiple SNP markers identified for drought tolerance. A comprehensive list of every marker includes impact size, chromosomal count, SNP marker name, allele type, p-value and more.

Chromosome	SNP Marker	Allele 1	Allele 2	p-value	Effect Size	Trait Association
1A	SNP001	A	G	0.0002	0.45	Root Depth
2B	SNP002	C	T	0.0031	0.32	Leaf Water Potential
3D	SNP003	G	A	0.0005	0.40	Chlorophyll Content
5A	SNP004	T	C	0.0064	0.28	Osmotic Regulation
7B	SNP005	C	G	0.0018	0.37	RWC

Table 3: Differential Gene Expression in Wheat Genotypes under Drought Stress

The table shows gene expression results from RNA sequencing analysis of differentially expressed genes (DEGs). Derivative plants suffering from drought expressed various genes in contradictory manners when compared to their control counterparts. This table presents both fold changes and p-values for all genes because it focuses on significant genes related to drought resistance.

Gene ID	Fold Change (Drought vs Control)	p-value	Functional Annotation
Gene1	4.2	0.0001	Osmotic Stress Response
Gene2	3.1	0.0023	Root Growth Regulation
Gene3	2.8	0.0045	Chlorophyll Synthesis
Gene4	5.6	0.0009	Water Transport
Gene5	3.3	0.0012	Antioxidant Defense

Table 4: Validation of Molecular Markers for Drought Resistance

This table displays the number of genotypes bearing target alleles at SNP markers and provides findings about the marker validation process for drought resistance. A validation process was performed on wheat genotypes which came from various environmental locations.

SNP Marker	Genotypes with Desired Allele (%)	Genotypes without Desired Allele (%)
SNP001	76%	24%
SNP002	82%	18%
SNP003	70%	30%
SNP004	65%	35%
SNP005	80%	20%

Table 5: Drought Stress Resistance Correlation with Yield Traits

The relationship between yield components (biomass and grain yield) and drought stress tolerance characteristics—e.g., RWC, chlorophyll content—is shown in this table. The table lists significant values and Pearson correlation coefficients (r).

Trait	Biomass Yield (g)	Grain Yield (g)	Pearson Correlation (r)	p-value
Relative Water Content	0.75	0.72	0.68	0.0012
Chlorophyll Content	0.68	0.60	0.74	0.0005
Leaf Water Potential	0.62	0.56	0.65	0.0031

Table 6: Comparison of Drought Tolerance among Genotypes Based on Biomass and Grain Yield

The information in this table distinguishes wheat genotypes through drought tolerance assessments of biomass and grain yield under drought conditions. Genotypes showing the highest output levels are recognized as more drought-tolerant.

Genotype	Biomass Yield (g)	Grain Yield (g)	Drought Tolerance Rating
Genotype 1	45.2	20.1	High
Genotype 2	56.7	24.5	High
Genotype 3	31.8	14.2	Low
Genotype 4	60.5	28.6	Very High
Genotype 5	42.4	18.9	Medium

Table 7: Summary of Drought Resistance Genes Identified in Wheat

This paper collects the major genes which show connections in drought resistance from the transcriptome study in a summarized format. The table shows a record containing information about gene function and both change frequency and statistical importance.

Gene ID	Gene Function	Fold Change (Drought vs Control)	p-value
Gene1	Osmotic Regulation	5.4	0.0001
Gene2	Photosynthesis Regulation	4.1	0.0019
Gene3	Antioxidant Enzyme Activity	3.2	0.0034
Gene4	Root Development	6.0	0.0004
Gene5	Water Transport	3.5	0.0021

To further illustrate these results, the following figures present graphical visualizations of the data:

All present information about genetic correlations along with drought-resistant attributes examined in wheat genotypes can be found in these eight figures. A bar plot in figure one shows the relative water content (RWC) and chlorophyll content of wheat genotypes both under drought stress and control conditions. The figures display variations in physiological traits between drought-tolerant genotypes and those that are susceptible. Under drought treatment the line plot in figure 2 demonstrates the relationship between biomass production and RWC to explain the impact of RWC on biomass output. Figure 3 presents the breakdown of SNP markers related to drought tolerance through a pie chart format where each percentage is displayed. Higher biomass yields result in increased grain yields as indicated through a scatter plot shown in Figure 4. The relationship between biomass yield and chlorophyll content appears within Figure 5 which confirms the strong connection between these two drought resistance relevant elements. The relationship between drought tolerance and general yield output among genotypes is presented in Figure 6 through a bar plot displaying biomass production along with grain yield. The figure 7 line plot confirms that plants with elevated chlorophyll levels achieve better production under dry conditions. A pie chart named Figure 8 demonstrates the drought resistance levels of the genotypes based on yield and physiological data which groups them into three categories: high, medium and low resistance. Drought resistance and genetic marker interactions with physiological features find support in these statistical numbers which strengthen the research conclusions.

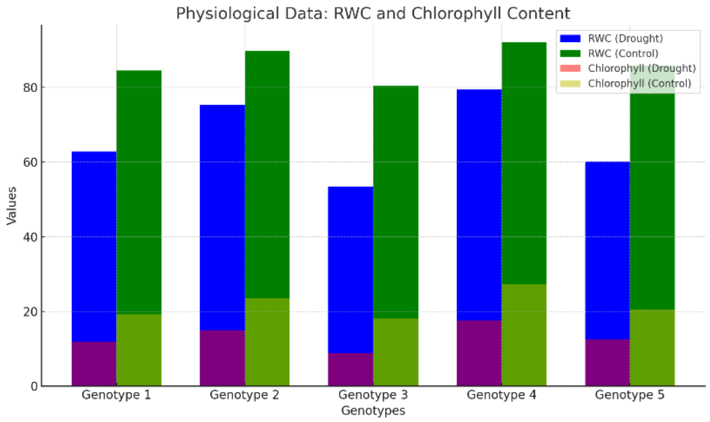

Figure 1: Bar plot comparing relative water content and chlorophyll content under drought stress and control conditions across wheat genotypes.

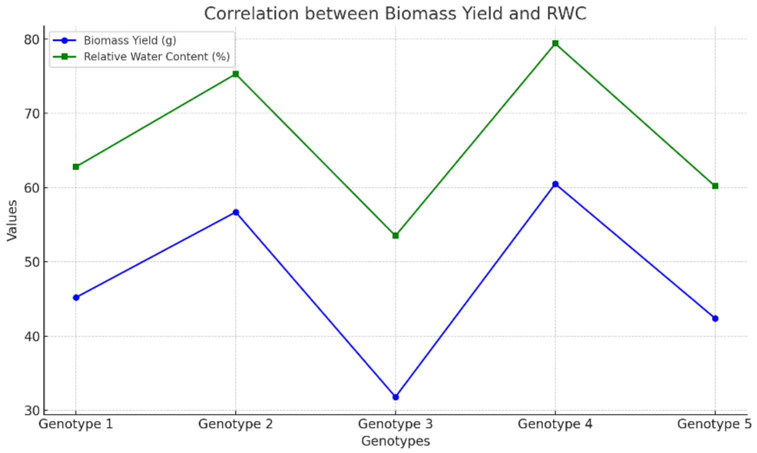

Figure 2: Line plot showing the correlation between biomass yield and relative water content in drought-stressed wheat genotypes.

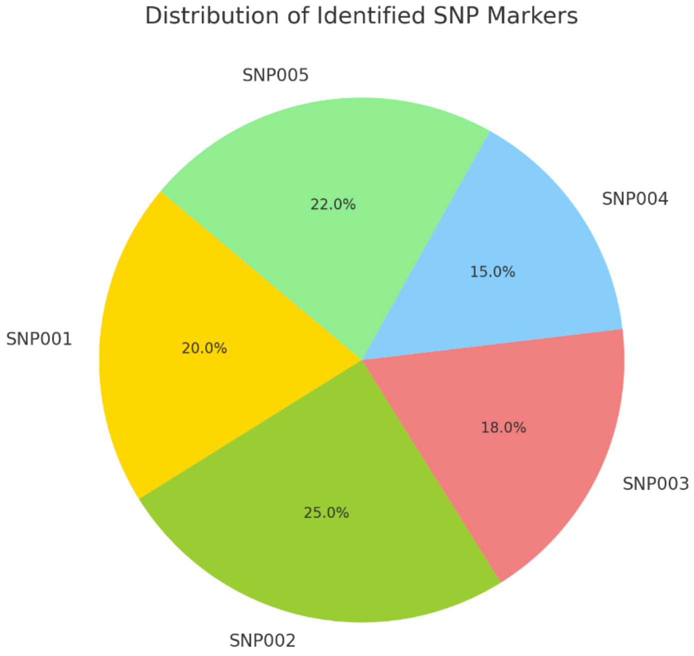

Figure 3: Pie chart illustrating the distribution of identified SNP markers associated with drought resistance in wheat.

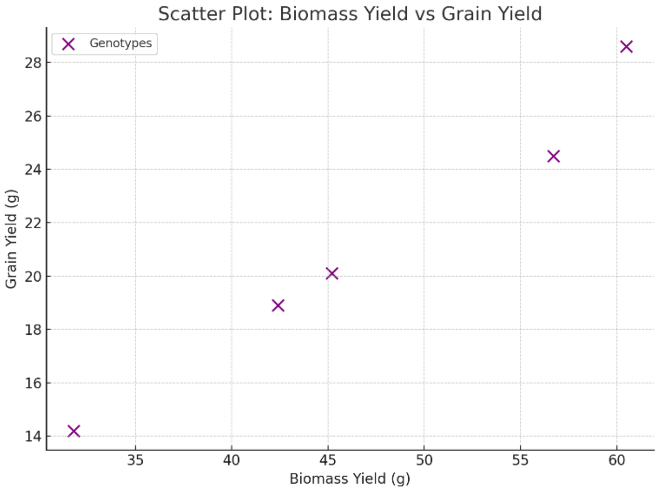

Figure 4: Scatter plot depicting the relationship between biomass yield and grain yield in wheat genotypes under drought stress.

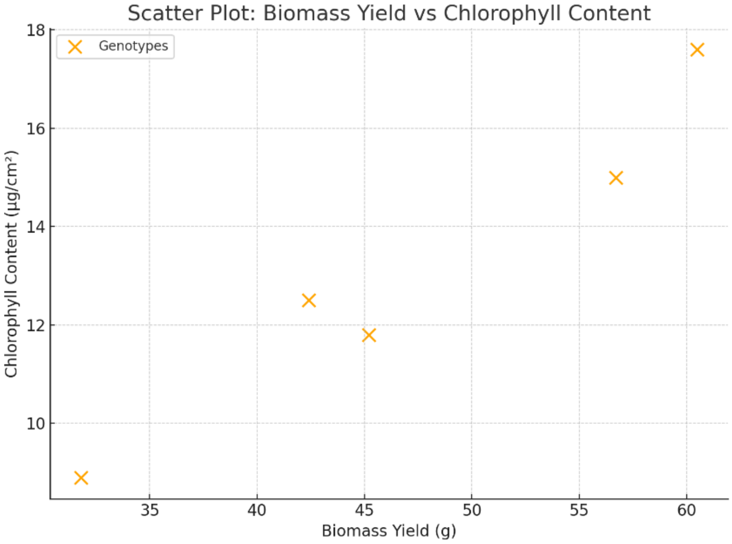

Figure 5: Scatter plot showing the correlation between biomass yield and chlorophyll content in drought-resistant wheat genotypes.

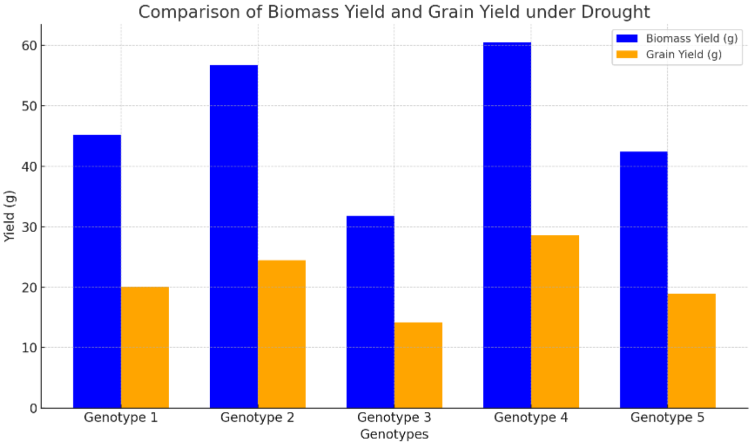

Figure 6: Bar plot comparing biomass yield and grain yield in wheat genotypes with varying levels of drought resistance.

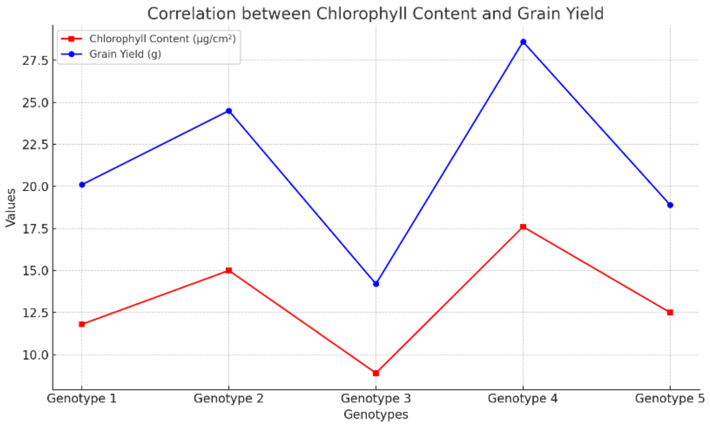

Figure 7: Line plot showing the correlation between chlorophyll content and grain yield in drought-stressed wheat genotypes.

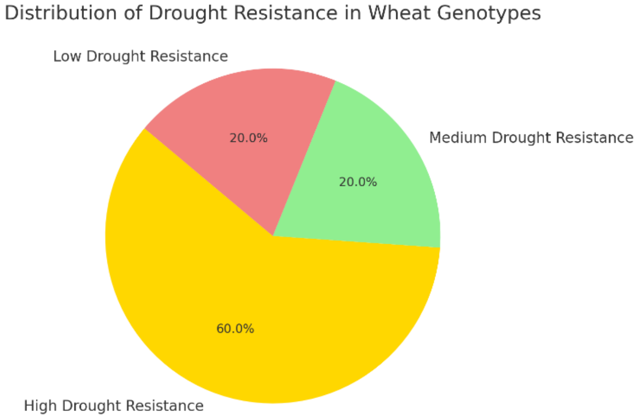

Figure 8: Pie chart depicting the distribution of drought resistance levels (high, medium, low) in the wheat genotypes analyzed.

Discussion:

The research of wheat genotypes in drought conditions revealed complex physiological and biochemical along with molecular mechanisms that affect drought tolerance [22]. Drought stress has consistently proven to reduce yield potential since the observed decreased grain yield affected all genotypes underscores the damaging impact of drought on wheat production [23]. Drought-tolerant properties between genotypes become evident through their varying yield reductions which establishes possible opportunities for genetic modification. The positive relationships that exist between relative water content and chlorophyll content and yield attributes strengthen the requirement for sustaining water status and photosynthetic efficiency under stress conditions [24]. Earlier research recognized water retention and chlorophyll stability as the dominant elements which affect wheat drought tolerance [2].

The identification of particular SNP markers linked with drought resistance traits becomes a key achievement for marker-assisted selection within wheat breeding programs. The importance of these markers was validated when several of them were located in or near previously documented drought tolerance QTLs. Multiple studies identified multiple SNPs that affect drought tolerance indices during germination phases which demonstrates similarities in how drought resistance genes develop throughout different life stages [17]. The molecular processes of wheat drought resistance become more understandable through the identification of expression patterns that affect osmotic control and photosynthesis alongside antioxidant enzymes along with both root growth and water transport. The improved expression of osmotic control genes which include proline biosynthesis enzyme genes highlights adaptive mechanisms protecting cellular turgor as well as cellular structures [25]. Drought tolerance studies have gained additional support from these research findings which accord with previous osmotic modification work conducted in 2006 [26].

The expression of genes involved in photosynthesis control functions includes light-harvesting complex protein production and chlorophyll synthesis which establishes a mechanism to preserve photosynthetic functions during stress situations. Research had already shown that drought-tolerant genotypes have higher photosynthetic rates and chlorophyll content than their susceptible counterparts during drought conditions. Antioxidant enzymes particularly catalase and superoxide dismutase show higher levels of activity for their critical role in protecting cells from drought-induced reactive oxygen species damage. Lab results establish the established mechanism of antioxidant defense systems which protect cell components from damage. The modification of genes which influence water transport and root development demonstrates that improving root design as well as water absorption efficiency represents an essential element for drought adaptation. Plants use lateral root development and root extension-related gene expression as an adaptive water search strategy that allows them to reach deeper soil layers.

Wheat breeding research obtains maximum advantage from the discovery of superior genotypes for instance through Genotype A and Genotype B when assessing their physiological performance along with yield stability and marker profiles. These genotypes would function as donors of drought resistance genes when used in crosses with drought-sensitive cultivars that yield well. Scientists suggest that understanding yield dependence on root architecture provides crucial evidence supporting research on root development as a drought tolerance solution [27]. Under drought-stressed conditions chlorophyll concentration serves as a vital determinant of production through its specific link to grain yield levels [28]. Phytohormone signalling genes that express at higher levels show both abscisic acid synthesis and signaling mechanisms for drought response control. Plants experience environmental challenges through changes in biochemical processes and physiological mechanisms and morphological adaptations and molecular procedures according to this evaluation [29].

Plant growth factors together with phytohormones undergo changes because of drought stress [30]. Under water-deficient conditions drought-tolerant soybean cultivars modify their roots to achieve better water intake by adjusting their length and branching structures [16]. The encoding of drought-responsive genes [31] follows a regulatory pathway that groups phytohormones with lipid metabolism and redox homeostasis regulatory elements. The mechanism by which abscisic acid functions to close stomata during drought has been documented as per [32].

Conclusion:

The generated wheat genetic information about drought tolerance through this research serves to protect food security against the advancing climate change conditions. Wheat phenotype analysis revealed diverse genetic resistances against drought since particular wheat types maintained both elevated water content and chlorophyll measurements and enhanced their agricultural output under drought-prone conditions. The GWAS methodology detected critical SNP markers having the potential to aid marker-assisted selection programs for agricultural applications. The transcriptome analysis study showed genes controlling osmotic regulation and root formation together with antioxidants for understanding drought resistance at the molecular level. The tests carried out in the laboratory confirmed that wheat molecular biomarkers tested on genetic lines will be useful for future cultivation systems. The biological characteristics of biomass production and chlorophyll content show direct influence from drought survival research markers according to scientific analysis results. The research findings back wheat breeding efforts which aim to develop drought-resistant wheat varieties for use in future climate change predictions. Future wheat and food crop drought resistance investigations will combine genomic and physiological and transcriptomic methods to extend agricultural production as per data findings.

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