

RESEARCH ARTICLE

## Perceived Utility of RAWEP in Gaining Knowledge on Communication Skill, Farm Resource Management and Socio-economic Aspects under AAU

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### Abstract

A study was conducted in the College of Agriculture, Jorhat under Assam Agricultural University on perceived utility of the 'Rural Agricultural Work Experience Programme (RAWEP)'. Purposive sampling technique was followed and statistical methods such as percentage, frequency, mean and ranking was used for analyzing the data. A total of 86 respondents were interviewed and majority of the respondents were of the opinion that the RAWEP was 'very much useful' for gaining various communication skills (48.01%). The study revealed that the RAWEP was 'useful' in gaining knowledge on 'farm resource management' (66.54%) and 'socio-economic aspect' (58.72%).

**Keywords:** Jorhat, purposive sampling technique, RAWEP, farm resource management, socio-economic aspect.

### Introduction

Agriculture is the backbone of the Indian economy as more than 70% of our population directly depends on agriculture for their subsistence. These farmers mostly reside in rural areas and hence development of our country cannot be possible without strengthening the socio-economic conditions under which a rural farmer works. Considering the importance of the knowledge on socio-economic behavior of the rural farmers under which the Agricultural graduates have to work, different committees (ICAR Review Committee, 1979; Deans Committee, 1981) suggested the linkage of agricultural education with actual farming situations. The Andhra Pradesh Agricultural University (Now Acharya N.G. Ranga Agricultural University, ANGRAU) for the first time in 1980-81 and subsequently some other State Agricultural Universities implemented the 'Rural Agricultural Work Experience Programme (RAWEP)' under which a student is to stay in a village with a host farmer to participate in the agricultural operations and to guide him in the adoption of new technology. The workshop on Academic Matters organized by Faculty of Agriculture, AAU in 1987, discussed in details the possibilities and suggested the incorporation of 'RAWEP' in the B.Sc. (Agri.) curriculum of AAU. The AAU after thorough discussion with the Department of Agriculture, Govt. of Assam decided to include the 'RAWEP' in the undergraduate curriculum in collaboration with the Department of Agriculture. Therefore, in AAU, Faculty of Agriculture first started its 'RAWEP' from 1991 batch onwards with the overall objectives to provide an opportunity to students to live in rural areas and develop right perspective of rural life (As per working manual for RAWEP, 2005).

As the 'RAWEP' is a new concept, therefore, it is necessary to know whether the students who had undergone practical experience during 'RAWEP' are being benefited or whether there is evidence of considerable and widespread dissatisfaction with the programme. If there is dissatisfaction, then its causes should be found out and remedial measures are to be taken by the concerned authorities and necessary changes should be made in the planning and implementation of the programme. A time to time evaluation of the programme in action would provide a basis to determine the progress or effectiveness of the programme. Shareef and Rambabu (1999) conducted a study on 'Reaction of students towards 'RAWEP' at ANGRAU and they reported that 66.67% of the respondents expressed satisfaction for the cooperation received from their host farmer. Moreover, 82.22% of the students opined positively for the readiness of the farmers to accept new agricultural technology. Bandyopadhyay and Kar (2002) conducted a study on Teachers and students perception about RAWEP and stated that 100% of the students gained experience regarding practical knowledge of different agricultural activities, many participatory approaches involved in PRA, about farmers, farm women and children, their lifestyle and involvement in various agricultural operations and experienced the difference between the theoretical and practical knowledge. Chauhan (2004) in his study on 'RAWEP programme: An appropriate model to create high quality human resources for sustainable extension services' found different impacts after this programme.

Various impacts were viz. Learning new experiences, managing relationship, observe problems, art of negotiation, understand the real life, time management, practicing method, develop teamwork, feedback, developing art of creative thinking, art of listening, conflict management, understanding recommended technology, understanding real world, money management, working style of local institution, working with local organizations/leaders and confidence building. Barman (1995) determined the usefulness of the content of farm issue of a local Assamese Daily by using five selected dimensions viz. timeliness, applicability, farm problem solvability, needfulness, regularity of publishing new farm information. Considering the above facts, this study was aimed to investigate the perceived utility of RAWEP in gaining knowledge on communication skill, farm resource management and socio-economic aspects under AAU.

### Materials and methods

**Study area:** The College of Agriculture, Jorhat under Assam Agricultural University was purposively selected as the locale of the present study.

**Experimental design:** A total of 86 respondents were purposively selected from two outgoing batches of undergraduate students (2005-06) of College of Agriculture, Jorhat.

**Instruments used:** Structured interview schedules were used to collect the data covering the objective of the study. To determine the utility of the RAWEP a total of 3 utility areas related to the RAWEP viz. Utility in gaining communication skills, utility in gaining knowledge on farm resource management and utility in gaining knowledge on socio-economic aspects were selected based on the RAWEP manual and by consulting experts. Statistical analysis of the data on different aspects of the study was done with the help of frequency, percentage, mean and rank.

### Results and discussion

**Utility in gaining communication skills:** It can be observed from Table 1 that there were almost an equal percentage of respondents (48.01%) and (50.50%) who perceived that the RAWEP was either 'very much useful' or 'useful' in gaining and improving communication skills. Only 1.50% of the respondents were of the opinion that the RAWEP was 'not at all useful' in gaining communication skills. It is evident that 'Interaction skills (Talking, listening etc.) got the highest mean score (2.66) and was ranked no. 1 followed by 'Knowledge and skills in conducting meetings, demonstrations etc.' with a mean score of 2.60. From the findings, it is clear that the RAWEP has been successful in contributing to improving the communication skills of the students to quite an extent if not to a great extent. The reason behind this may be the fact that the students get many opportunities to speak in public during the RAWEP due to the conduct of method demonstrations, farm and home visit etc. in the curriculum. This gives the students, the confidence that is needed to become a better communicator. Without proper communication skills, working successfully in rural areas is next to impossible. Any change agent should have the ability to gauge the unfelt needs of the farmers. Then, through effective communication, he should be able to make the farmer recognize their needs. Among the various utility areas studied under communication skills, the maximum numbers of positive responses were got by interaction skills (66.28%). This may be because during the RAWEP, the students have to interact with farmers from different socio-economic status groups. During their tenure in the villages they keep on developing different skills like speaking and listening skills. The information centre that students have to open is also responsible for improving their interaction skills. It was seen that minimum number of positive responses was got by the utility area 'Information processing and analysis' (24.42%).

Table 1. Students perceived utility of RAWEP in terms of gaining knowledge on 'communication skill' (n=86).

Utility areas	Frequency (%)			Mean score	Rank
	Very much useful	Useful	Not at all useful		
Interaction skills (talking, listening etc.)	57 (66.28)	29 (33.72)	0 (0.00)	2.66	I
Knowledge and skills in conducting group discussions, meetings, demonstrations, field days, trainings, establishing of information booth, etc.	54 (62.79)	30 (34.88)	2 (2.33)	2.60	II
Public speaking	47 (54.65)	38 (44.19)	1 (1.16)	2.53	III
Preparation of AV aids and other written documents like posters, report writing, etc.	38 (44.19)	48 (55.81)	0 (0.00)	2.44	IV
Understanding and using local proverbs/dialects etc.	38 (44.19)	47 (54.65)	1 (1.16)	2.43	V
Use of AV aids (charts, OHP, posters, flannel graphs etc.)	34 (39.53)	50 (58.14)	2 (2.33)	2.37	VI
Information processing and analysis	21 (24.42)	62 (72.09)	3 (3.49)	2.21	VII
Total	289 (48.01)	304 (50.50)	9 (1.50)		

Table 2. Students perceived utility of RAWEP in terms of gaining knowledge on 'farm resource management' (n=86).

Utility areas	Frequency (%)			Mean score	Rank
	Very much useful	Useful	Not at all useful		
Farm management skills	27 (31.40)	53 (61.63)	6 (6.98)	2.24	I
Understanding management practices of farmers in their farming activities	24 (27.91)	59 (68.60)	3 (3.49)	2.24	I
Developing skills in family budgeting	17 (19.77)	67 (77.91)	2 (2.33)	2.17	II
Knowledge on institutions providing agricultural finance	23 (26.74)	53 (61.63)	10 (11.63)	2.15	III
Marketing of agricultural products	22 (25.58)	53 (61.63)	11 (12.79)	2.13	IV
Factors affecting demand/ supply of agricultural products	16 (18.60)	62 (72.09)	8 (9.30)	2.09	V
Natural resource management	17 (19.77)	58 (67.44)	11 (12.79)	2.07	VI
Knowledge on input supply agencies of different agricultural inputs	16 (18.60)	55 (63.95)	15 (17.44)	2.01	VII
Resource mobilization	15 (17.44)	55 (63.95)	16 (18.60)	1.99	VIII
Total	177 (22.87)	515 (66.54)	82 (10.59)		

It was also noteworthy that under the utility areas of interaction skills and preparation of AV aids, none of the students responded in the 'not at all useful' category. From this finding it is clear that all the students have been benefited to at least some extent in this regard. Gogoi (2001) reported that most serious problem faced by students undergoing RAWEP was problem regarding extension literature and print materials followed by problems in organizing training programmes and problem related to supervision.

*Utility in gaining knowledge on farm resource management:* Most of the respondents (66.54%) considered RAWEP to be 'useful' for learning about the marketing and management of various agricultural commodities and other resources and 22.87% of them considered it to be 'Very much useful'. Moreover, 10.59% of the respondents opined that the RAWEP was 'not at all useful' in learning about the marketing and management of various agricultural commodities and resources (Table 2). It is evident from the table that both 'Farm management skills' and 'Understanding management practices of farmers in their farming activities' were ranked no.1 in relation to their perceived utility with mean scores of 2.24 in both cases. It was observed that 'Resource mobilization' got the least mean score (1.99) and was ranked last. From the above finding, it is evident that very few respondents considered the RAWEP to be 'very much useful' in this regard. Although the utility area of 'farm management skills' and 'resource mobilization' got the maximum and minimum number of positive responses respectively, it was noteworthy that the difference in the number of positive responses between these two was very less. This shows that the range of positive responses among the various utility areas was very small. This may be due to the fact that in many rural areas there aren't many input supply agencies and institutions providing agricultural finance.

They are generally present in nearby semi-urban areas. Only few students who keep on pestering the host farmer for such information might have benefited in this regard. Some of the respondents mentioned that as they were mostly associated with marginal farmers and hence they did not get the opportunity to learn much about different aspects of marketing and management of various kinds of resources. This is clearly evident in case of the utility area of 'resource mobilization' in which (18.60%) students responded in the 'not at all useful' category. One surprising finding was that only 19.77% respondents perceived that RAWEP to be 'very much useful' in developing family budgeting skills. This shows that there is a lot of scope to improve the family budgeting skills of the students by the programme supervisors. As the students are making family budgets themselves and still not learning much about it, there might be some serious lacunas in the process of guidance and supervision and the authorities should look into this matter.

*Utility in gaining knowledge on socio-economic aspects:* More than half of the respondents (58.72%) perceived that the RAWEP was 'useful' in knowing about the socio-economic conditions prevailing in rural areas and 35.58% respondents considered it to be 'very much useful'. Only 5.70% felt it was 'not at all useful' (Table 3). It is evident from the table that the utility area of 'Developing right attitude towards farming community' achieved the highest mean score (2.57) followed by 'Adaptability to rural situations' (2.43), whereas 'Gaining knowledge on time utilisation pattern of rural people' was ranked last with a mean score of 2.08. It is evident from Table 3 that the RAWEP has done a good job in helping them learn about various socio-economic aspects of rural areas. Also, 56.98% respondents considered the RAWEP 'very much useful' in developing right attitude towards farming community. It is also worth mentioning that the above mentioned utility area did not produce one single negative response.

Table 3. Students perceived utility of RAWEP in terms of gaining knowledge on 'socio-economic aspects' (n=86).

Utility areas	Frequency (%)			Mean score	Rank
	Very much useful	Useful	Not at all useful		
Developing right attitude towards farming community	49 (56.98)	37 (43.02)	0 (0.00)	2.57	I
Adaptability to rural situations	39 (43.35)	45 (52.33)	2 (2.33)	2.43	II
Understanding the sentiments of farmers of different socio-economic status groups	37 (43.02)	46 (53.49)	3 (3.49)	2.40	III
Knowledge and skills on socio-economic situation analysis	33 (38.37)	48 (55.81)	5 (5.81)	2.33	IV
Knowledge and skills in leadership development	31 (36.05)	50 (58.14)	5 (5.81)	2.30	V
Knowledge on rural cultural background	28 (32.56)	56 (65.12)	2 (2.33)	2.30	V
Developing right perspective on rural youth	34 (39.53)	44 (51.16)	8 (9.30)	2.30	V
Knowledge on SHGs, Mahila mandals and other such social institutions	23 (26.74)	54 (62.79)	9 (10.47)	2.16	VI
Knowledge and understanding on rural unemployment	15 (17.44)	66 (76.74)	5 (5.81)	2.12	VII
Gaining knowledge on time utilization pattern of rural people	17 (19.77)	59 (68.60)	10 (11.63)	2.08	VIII
Total	306 (35.58)	505 (58.72)	49 (5.70)		

'Adaptability to rural situations', 'Understanding the sentiments of farmers of different socio-economic status groups' and 'Developing right perspective on rural youth' also got quite a healthy percentage of positive responses (43.35%, 43.02% and 39.53% respectively). The utility area 'Knowledge and understanding on rural unemployment' got only 17.44% positive responses. This might have been because although the RAWEP is a rural area oriented programme, the involvement of students in rural development activities is very less due to various constraints. Probably due to this reason they do not gain much understanding of areas like rural unemployment.

### Conclusion

Majority of the respondents were of the opinion that the RAWEP was 'very much useful' for gaining various communication skills (48.01%). It can be said that the RAWEP was 'very much successful' in developing better communication skills in students to do better agricultural extension work. It can also be observed that RAWEP was 'useful' in gaining knowledge on 'farm resource management' (66.54%) and 'socio-economic aspect' (58.72%).

### References

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