J Hum Ecol, 42(3): 295-302 (2013)
PRINT: ISSN 0970-9274 ONLINE: ISSN 2456-6608 DOI: 10.31901/24566608.2013/42.3.11

Analysis of Utility Status of College Students in Assam Agricultural University under Rural Agricultural Work Experience Programme (RAWE)

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KEYWORDS Communication Skills. Cumulative Grade Point Average. Inter-correlation. Undergraduate

ABSTRACT The Rural Agricultural Work Experience Programme (RAWE) has become an integral part of the B. Sc (Agri) degree programme in Assam Agricultural University, India, since its introduction in 1991.The present study to ascertain the degree of utility of the RAWE programme in terms of strong establishment of linkage with farming community and successful transfer of agricultural technology to farmers' field was conducted in Assam Agricultural University, India with a total sample size of 86 undergraduate students. The study reveals that among the utility areas identified under the study, communication skills showed the highest positive response as reported by 48.01% respondents followed by courses undergone (45.35 %) and farm practices (39.02%). While utility areas of rural development (19.65%) and marketing and management of resources (23.10%) showed least positive responses from the students in terms of their utility towards agricultural development in study areas. The study further shows that variables such as sex, Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA), location of RAWEP.

INTRODUCTION

Agriculture is the backbone of the Indian economy on which majority of rural people depend for their income and livelihood security. Considering the importance of agricultural knowledge on socio-economic behavior of the farmers, Agricultural Graduates during internship have to work and study in rural areas as per university norms. Different committees (ICAR Review Committee 1979; Deans Committee 1981) recommended for strong linkage of agricultural education with actual farming situation through the programme. In India, Andhra Pradesh Agricultural University introduced the programme for the first time in 1980-81which was subsequently followed by other State Agricultural Universities 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 a new technology in the local farming situations. Shareef and Rambabu (1999) in their study on RAWEP reported that 66.67 % respondents expressed satisfaction for the cooperation received from their host farmer in Andhra Pradesh state of India.

Research Background and Significance

In India, the Andhra Pradesh Agricultural University introduced the RAWE programme as part of Undergraduate degree programme for the first time under which a student has to stay in a village with a host farmer to participate in the agricultural operations and to guide him in the adoption of a new technology. Sinha et al. (1968) conducted an analysis on pre- service training programmes. They reported that the knowledge of agricultural graduates was very theoretical and they lacked practical insight. According to Dahama and Bhatnagar (1980), training means to educate a person so as to be fitted, qualified and proficient in doing some job. Considering its significant role in the socio-economic development of farming community, the Assam Agricultural University in consultation with the Department of Agriculture, Govt. of Assam decided to include the "RAWE" programme in the Under Graduate curriculum since 1991. The main objectives of the programme are-

- To provide an opportunity to students to live in rural areas and develop right perspective of rural life.

- To help students to gain first hand experience in the application of agricultural technologies on the farmers field.
- To make students understand and appreciate the constraints in the application of latest farm technology on the farmers field.
- To develop communication skills in students to do better agricultural extension work.
- To help students to develop right attitude towards farming community.
- To make the students aware of various agencies working for rural development and
- To know the sentiment of different socio economical behaviour of the rural society to be faced during their working period.

As per the working prescribed manual for RAWE programme, University's Research Stations, Krishi Vigyan Kendras and Off Campus Colleges of the faculty are selected as RAWE stations for placement of students under the programme which are also known as RAWE stations. These selected stations will provide sufficient logistic and communication support including scientific manpower to the students for successful implementation of the programme.

Selection of RAWE Villages

As per Working Manual for "RAWE" Programme 2005, the RAWE villages should have the following features-

- The villages should be approachable by bus from RAWE station and preferably linked with one route so that the programme supervisor can supervise many villages in one tour conveniently.
- The villages should be able to provide lodging and boarding facilities to the students.
- The villages may have preferably progressive farmers who have served or are serving as contact farmers to the Department of Agriculture.
- The villages should preferably possess different types of soils and crops.
- Villages where mixed farming is available like poultry, dairying, pig rearing, sheep rearing, fruit, vegetable or floriculture may be given preference.
- The villages should already be exposed to extension activities of the department of agriculture like organization of demonstration plots, minikit trials, introduction of new crops/varieties etc.
- The villages may have youth clubs, library associations and other recreational facilities.

Under this programme, each student is involved in the following activities

- Study of agro economic situations of the village including crop production technology followed by farmers.
- Participation and counseling in the day to day farm operations of the host farmer and farmers of the village.
- Farm planning and preparation of family budgets for farmers.
- Planning and execution of extension programmes in the village.

Programme of Work

Duration of programme is for one semester of six months. The students spend the last semester of 4th year B.Sc (Ag) degree programme in the villages. The students in groups are placed under the control of the In-charge of Off Campus Research Stations located in different zones of the state. The students are in turn are allotted, in batches of three to six to a selected village in the vicinity of the research station. Finally, each student is attached to a host farmer of the village. The students live with his/her host farmer or make his/her own arrangement for staying in the village.

Objectives

The main objective of the study was to assess the utility status of the RAWE programme in the socio-economic development of farmers through transfer of agricultural technologies. To achieve the main objective the following specific objectives were formulated.

i. To assess the utility status of the RAWE programme as perceived by the students.
ii. To determine the factors affecting the utility of the RAWE Programme.
iii. To assess the problems faced by the students during RAWEP.

METHODOLOGY

Planning and Location of the Study

The study was conducted in the College of Agriculture, Jorhat under Assam Agricultural University. A sample of 86 students who spent final semester (six months) of four years B. Sc (Ag) in rural areas as part of their academic degree programme were selected as respondents

through purposive sampling technique for the present study.

Sample Size and Sample Procedure

Respondents were purposively selected from two outgoing batches of Under Graduate students of College of Agriculture, Assam Agricultural University, India, that is, students who-

i. Undergone the Rural Agricultural Work Experience Programme in 2005 and
ii. Undergone the Rural Agricultural Work Experience Programme in 2006.

Pre-testing of Data Collection Tools

In order to measure the perceived utility of the RAWE Programme, a test schedule covering all aspects of the RAWEP programme was prepared for data collection. To determine the simplicity in understanding the content and clarity of language of the questionnaire, pre-testing was done. The instrument was administered to 10 non-sample respondents. 'Test and re-test' method was applied to see the reliability of the measuring instrument and was found highly significant at 0.01 level of probability.

Measurement of Perceived Utility of the RAWEP Programme

To determine the utility of the RAWE program, a total of 11 utility areas (indicators) related to the RAWE programme viz. utility in gaining communication skills, utility in gaining knowledge on socio- economic aspects, utility in gaining knowledge on various farm practices, utility in gaining knowledge related to diffusion of agricultural technologies, utility in gaining knowledge on rural development, gaining knowledge on extension programme planning, knowledge on agro-economic conditions, gaining knowledge on agro-economic conditions, gaining miscellaneous knowledge etc. These variables were measured with the help of a test schedule in 3-point continuum scale viz; "Very much useful", "Useful" and "Not at all useful". Ingle et al.(1983) while evaluating the 'foundation course organized by Punjabrao Krishi Vidyapeeth, Akola for Village Development Officers (VDOs), under Training and Visit (T&V) system used a five point continuum , that is, 'very useful', 'useful', 'moderately useful' , not much useful' and 'not useful' with 5,4,3,2 and 1 score respectively to ascertain the opinion of the trainees on utility.

Method of Data Collection

The questionnaires were sent through postal services as well as e-mail to all the selected respondents. Clarification for any doubt on any item of the questionnaire was made with the respondents over telephone and their responses were collected accordingly with utmost care in the light of the set objectives.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Utility in Gaining Communication Skills

Data in Table 1 show that majority of the respondents had perceived the RAWE pro-

Table 1: Students perceived utility of RAWEP in terms of communication skills (N=86)

S. No.	*Utility areas*	*Frequency (%)*		
		Very much useful	*Useful*	*Not at all useful*
1	Interaction skills	57(66.28)	29(33.72)	0 (0.00)
2	Public speaking	47(54.65)	38(44.19)	1 (1.16)
3	Use of Audio-Vidual Aids	34(39.53)	50(58.14)	2 (2.33)
4	Preparation of AV aids and other written documents like posters , report writing etc.	38(44.19)	48(55.81)	0 (0.00)
5	Knowledge and skills in conducting group discussions, meetings, demonstrations etc.	54(62.79)	30(34.88)	2 (2.33)
6	Information processing and analysis	21(24.42)	62(72.09)	3 (3.49)
7	Understanding and using local proverbs/dialects etc.	38(44.19)	47(54.65)	1 (1.16)
	Total	289(48.01)	303(50.33)	10 (1.66)

gramme as either 'very much useful' (48.01%) or 'useful' (50.33%) in gaining and improving communication skills. Only 1.66% of the respondents were of the opinion that the RAWEP was 'not at all useful' in gaining communication skills. From the findings it is evident that 'Interaction skills (talking, listening etc.) got the highest mean score (2.66) and ranked first followed by knowledge and skills in conducting meetings, demonstrations etc. with a mean score of 2.60. It is implied that the RAWE Programme had been effective in enhancing the communication skills of the students which may be due to various opportunities availed by the students to address the public through group discussion, method demonstrations etc.

Therefore students develop competency in public speaking. Another reason is that as per the guidelines the students had to establish an information centre in the village which helped them in improving their interaction skills. By and large, graduate students of Assam Agricultural University had perceived all the selected seven utility areas as very much useful to useful ranging from 48.01% to 50.033% for improving their communication skills, thereby enhancing their educational quality and personality development.

Utility in Gaining Knowledge on Socio-economic Aspects

Table 2 shows that over half of the respondents (58.32%) perceived that the RAWE programme was useful in knowing about the socio-economic conditions prevailing in rural areas and 35.97 % respondents considered it to be 'very much useful'. Only 5.70% felt it was 'not at all useful'.

The findings showed that the utility area of developing right attitude towards farming community' achieved that the highest mean score (2.57) followed by 'adaptability to rural situations' (2.43), whereas 'gaining knowledge on time utilization pattern of rural people' was ranked last with a mean score of 2.08. Thus, the findings reflect that the RAWE programme helped them to know about various socio economic aspects of rural areas. There were 56.98% respondents who considered that the RAWE programme was very much useful in developing right attitude towards the farming community. None of the respondents opined against this statement. Similarly Chauhan (2004) also in his study on 'RAWE programme : An appropriate model to create high quality human resources for sustainable extension services' found that different impacts after this programme were viz. learning new experiences , managing relationship , observe problems, art of negotiation, understand the real life, time management, develop team work, understanding recommended technology etc.

Utility in Gaining Knowledge on Various Farm Practices

It is evident from Table 3 that majority of the respondents (56.31%) perceived that the RAWE

Table 2: Students perceived utility of RAWEP regarding socio- economic aspects (N=86)

S. No.	*Utility areas*	*Frequency (%)*		
		Very much useful	*Useful*	*Not at all useful*
1	Developing right attitude towards farming community	49(56.98)	37(43.2)	0(0.00)
2	Knowledge and skills on socio-economic situation analysis	33(38.37)	48(55.81)	5(5.81)
3	Knowledge and skills in leadership development	31(36.05)	50(58.14)	5(5.81)
4	Knowledge on rural cultural background	28(32.56)	56(65.12)	2(2.33)
5	Developing right perspective on rural youth	34(39.53)	44(51.16)	8(9.30)
6	Knowledge on SHGs, *mahila mandals* and other such social institutions	23(26.74)	54(62.79)	9(10.47)
7	Adaptability to rural situations	39(43.35)	45(52.33)	2(2.33)
8	Gaining knowledge on time utilization pattern of rural people	17(19.77)	59(68.60)	10(11.63)
9	Understanding the sentiments of farmers	37(43.02)	46(53.49)	3(3.49)
10	Knowledge and understanding on rural unemployment	15(17.44)	66(76.74)	5(5.81)

Table 3: Students perceived utility of RAWE programme in terms of farm practices (N=86)

S. No.	*Utility areas*	*Frequency (%)*		
		Very much useful	*Useful*	*Not at all useful*
1	Understanding location specific technologies	40(46.51)	46(53.49)	0(0.00)
2	Identification of existing farming system	44(51.16)	42(48.84)	0(0.00)
3	Knowledge and skills on farming situation analysis	27(31.40)	56(65.12)	3(3.49)
4	Understanding existing cropping pattern	37(43.02)	49(56.98)	0(0.00)
5	Farm planning and execution	29(33.72)	49(56.98)	8(9.30)
6	Knowledge and skills on farm operations	29(33.72)	52(60.47)	5(5.81)
7	Modern agricultural technologies used by farmers	32(37.21)	50(58.14)	4(4.65)
8	Knowledge on various ITKs of that area and their rationality	46(53.49)	40(46.51)	0(0.00)
9	Counseling in the day- to- day farm operations of the farmer	19(22.09)	52(60.47)	15(17.44)
10	Knowledge and skills in maintaining record of farm activities	23(26.74)	58(67.44)	5(5.81)
11	Costs of cultivation of various crops	37(43.02)	47(54.65)	2(2.33)

programme was 'useful' in learning about various farm practices and 39.02% felt that it was 'very much useful'. Only 4.67% respondents expressed that it was 'not at all useful'. From the findings it was observed that 'knowledge on various ITKs of that area and their rationality' was ranked no.1 with a mean score of 2.53. 'Identification of existing farming system" was ranked 2nd (mean score=2.51), whereas 'counseling in the day to day farm operations of the farmers 'with its mean score of 2.21 was ranked last. Misro (1996) in his study entitled 'A study on utility and impact of training under the project training and extension for women in agriculture in Ganjam district of Orissa' reported that 5 practices (spray solution preparation, seed treatment, improved compost making, improved storage practices and shallow and erect planting) were perceived to be 'very useful' and four practices (nursery management, germination test, soil sample collection and mushroom cultivation) were perceived to be "useful' areas of training.

Amongst the utility areas; "Knowledge on various ITKs of that area and their rationality" showed maximum positive responses. It clearly indicates that the programme immensely helped the students to witness and understand the Indigenous Technological Knowledge prevailing in the area. Similarly, all the respondents unanimously agreed that it also helped in "understanding location specific technologies", "Identification of existing farming system" as well as "understanding existing cropping pattern". All this knowledge is very essential for a student for his/her professional career in future.

Utility in Gaining Knowledge Related to Diffusion of Agricultural Technology

The study reveals from Table 4 that the majority of the respondents (60.93%) perceived the RAWE programme 'useful' in gaining knowledge on the various aspects of diffusion of agricultural technology and about one third (32.22 %) perceived it to be 'very much useful'.

Only 6.84% opined that it was 'not at all useful". The ranking using weighted mean revealed that finding the gap between recommended technology and implemented technology(mean score=2.45) was ranked no.1 while knowledge and skills on diffusion of agricultural innovations got the lowest rank (mean score=2.16) among the sub utility areas under diffusion of agricultural technology. As most of the students (47.67%) considered the RAWE programme to be very much useful in finding the gap between recommended and implemented technology. The least number of positive responses were obtained in the "Utility area on knowledge and skills on diffusion of agricultural innovations" (20.93%). It may be due to the fact that most B.Sc (Ag) students are not fully aware of new agricultural innovations and their implications under different situation.

Table 4: Utility in gaining knowledge related to diffusion of agricultural technology (N=86)

S. No.	*Utility areas*	*Frequency (%)*		
		Very much useful	*Useful*	*Not at all useful*
1	Promotion of agricultural innovations	24(27.91)	52(60.47)	10(11.63)
2	Finding the gap between recommended technology and implemented technology	41(47.67)	43(50.00)	2(2.33)
3	Knowledge and skills on transfer of technology	29(33.72)	51(59.30)	6(6.98)
4	Knowledge on adoption of modern technologies by farming community	22(25.58)	56(65.12)	8(9.30)
5	Knowledge and skills on diffusion of agricultural innovations	18(20.93)	64(74.42)	4(4.65)
6	Decision making on farming activities	26(30.23)	51(59.30)	9(10.47)
7	Understanding the problems of adoption and diffusion	30(34.88)	52(60.47)	4(4.65)

Utility in Gaining Knowledge on Rural Development

It is evident from Table 5 that the majority of the respondents (64.80%) perceived that the RAWE programme was 'useful' in gaining knowledge about the various aspects of rural development. However 19.65 percent respondents felt it was 'very much useful'. A noteworthy finding was that 15.56 per cent respondents opined that RAWEP was 'not at all useful' for learning about rural development. On the various sub utility areas of rural development the table shows that the 1st rank was shared by 'participation in different village social work' and 'exploring the scope of agro based industries for rural development' (mean score=2.22).

Whereas, 'knowledge on initiation and functioning of rural youth club' was ranked lowest (mean score 1.80). In terms of different aspects related to rural development the perceived utility of the RAWE programme is not very impressive. Here, highest number of positive responses were only 31.40% obtained in the utility area 'Exploring the scope of agro based industries for rural development'. Moreover, 'knowledge and understanding on NGOs, other voluntary organizations linked with rural development' had negative responses from 19.77% students. This is probably due to non linkage with NGO as per the curriculum of RAWEP.

Table 5: Students perceived utility of RAWEP in terms of aspects of rural development

S. No.	*Utility areas*	*Frequency (%)*		
		Very much useful	*Useful*	*Not at all useful*
1	Knowledge on initiation and functioning of rural youth clubs	6(6.98)	57(66.28)	23(26.74)
2	Knowledge on RD programmes of the Area	19(22.09)	55(63.95)	12(13.95)
3	Knowledge and understanding on NGO,s and other voluntary organizations linked with RD	11(12.79)	58(67.44)	17(19.77)
4	Knowledge on functioning of DRDA, NYK, adult education center etc.	15(17.44)	45(52.33)	26(30.23)
5	Participation in different village social work	21(24.42)	63(73.26)	2(2.33)
6	Capacity building in mobilizing available resources for RD	18(20.93)	53(61.63)	15(17.44)
7	Exploring the scope for agro based industries for RD	27(31.40)	51(59.30)	8(9.30)
8	Overall professional development to serve in the RD sector	23(26.74)	52(60.47)	11(12.79)
9	Challenges in RD activities	9(10.47)	65(75.58)	12(13.95)
10	Understanding constraints in RD	18(20.93)	61(70.93)	7(8.14)

Utility in Gaining Knowledge on Extension Programme Planning

Table 6 indicates that majority of the respondents(59.63%) opined that the RAWE programme was 'useful' in gaining knowledge on extension programme planning while for 34.72 percent respondents it was 'very much useful'. Only 5.65 per cent respondents opined that it was 'not at all useful'. Amongst various sub utility areas 'organising agricultural exhibitions and training programmes' showed the highest mean score (2.42) , whereas the last rank was found in 'knowledge on economic usefulness of various extension programmes' (mean score 2.20).

This may be due to the reason that in the stations where students were allotted for their RAWEP, different agricultural exhibitions, farmers fair etc. were held and students were involved in those exhibitions. While participating in those exhibitions they were able to know about various problems related to planning a particular programme. They could also analyse the causes for success and failure of such programmes.

Relationship between Perceived Utility towards the RAWE Programme with the Selected Independent Variables

Karl Pearson's coefficient of correlation was used to examine the relationship of the selected independent variables viz. age, sex, CGPA, location of RAWEP, area of specialization, family background and achievement motivation with the dependent variable viz. perceived utility towards the RAWE Programme.

The findings presented in Table 7 of the correlation analysis reveal that the relationship between perceived utility towards RAWEP and age, sex, CGPA and location of RAWEP was negative even though the 't'-value was not significant. Similarly, the correlation between perceived utility towards RAWEP and area of specialization, family background and achievement motivation was also found non significant but their corresponding positive 't'-values indicate positive association of these variables with the dependent variable.

Table 7: Correlation co-efficient of utility of RAWEP with other parameters

Parameters	*R*	*t - value*
Age	-0.1648	1.532
Sex	-0.0997	0.918
CGPA	-0.0771	0.709
Location of RAWEP	-0.0277	0.254
Area of specialization	0.1536	1.425
Family background	0.0844	0.777
Achievement motivation	0.1426	1.320

Table 8 reflects further, analysis of inter-correlation among the different variables. It reveals that sex and CGPA had a significant relationship (5% level of significance).

While locations of RAWEP programme where students were engaged with basic amenities including information, communication and transportation played significant role towards academic performance of the students and thus helped towards improvement of their overall CGPA which was evident from the corresponding significant 'r' value. The results also show that there was positively significant relationship between achievement motivation and CGPA.

Table 6: Students perceived utility of RAWEP in terms of extension programme planning (N=86)

S. No.	*Utility areas*	*Frequency (%)*		
		Very much useful	*Useful*	*Not at all useful*
1	Knowledge and skills in programme planning	36(41.86)	48(55.81)	2(2.33)
2	Need assessment skills	23(26.74)	59(68.60)	4(4.65)
3	Extension programme formulation	25(29.07)	54(62.79)	7(8.14)
4	Knowledge on implementing various extension programme	30(34.88)	54(62.79)	7(8.14)
5	Orgnising exhibitions/training programmes	41(47.67)	40(46.51)	5(5.81)
6	Monitoring and evaluation of extension programmes	22(25.58)	59(68.60)	5(5.81)
7	Knowledge on economic usefulness of various extension programmes	26(30.23)	51(59.30)	9(10.47)

Table 8: Inter-correlation ship among different variables correlation coefficients (Overall) (N=86)

Independent variables	*Utility*	*Age*	*Sex*	*CGPA*	*Location of RAWEP*	*Area of specialization*	*Family back ground*	*Achievement motivation*
Utility	1							
Age	-0.1648	1						
Sex	-0.0997	-0.1703	1					
CGPA	-0.0771	-0.1554	0.2392*	1				
Location of RAWEP	-0.0277	-0.1957	0.1255	0.2190*	1			
Area of specialization	-0.0419	-0.0184	-0.0788	-0.0462	0.0175	1		
Family background	0.0844	-0.0274	-0.1041	-0.0383	0.0494	0.17997	1	
Achievement motivation	0.1426	-0.2225	0.29563**	0.29646**	0.0303	0.02100	0.04158	1

* Significant at 0.05 level of significance
** Significant at 0.01 level of significance

CONCLUSION

Results of the study indicate that most of the graduate students were of the opinion that the RAWE Programme was "very much useful " for gaining various communication skills in applying knowledge related to course curriculum, to learn more and in learning about various farm practices. In gaining knowledge on rural development, few students perceived the RAWE Programme to be 'not at all useful'. The study further revealed that, in the following sub utility areas viz. interaction skills (talking, listening), preparation of AV aids and other written documents like posters, report writing etc.; developing right attitude towards farming community, understanding location specific technologies; identification of existing farming system and gaining knowledge on various ITKs of that area and their rationality. Whereas the sub utility areas of knowledge and functioning of DRDA (District Rural Development Agency), Adult Education Centres etc. and knowledge on initiation and functioning of Rural Youth Clubs got the maximum number of responses in the 'not at all useful category'. Most serious problems 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.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study suggests that in order to improve the RAWE programme of the college, the programme should be recommended only after a session of orientation of the students on the mandated activities of the programme that the students are going to undertake. Preliminary collection of information and understanding of the socio-cultural and value systems of the local people is of paramount importance so that a strong relationship with the local people and good rapport can be established. It is also recommended that the college authority must revisit the entire RAWEP programme which should not be held during the 8th semester as it coincides with different competitive examinations. The university authority may try to add few more activities like opening of rural youth clubs and NGO involvement to make the programme more interesting and effective for the students.

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