

Effect of biofortification with zinc and iron on growth parameters, yield attributes and yield of Barley (*Hordeum vulgare* L.)

Abstract

A field experiment was conducted during *Rabi* season of 2021-2022 at Students' Instructional Farm (S.I.F.) of Chandra Shekhar Azad University of Agriculture and Technology, Kanpur, Uttar Pradesh. The present experiment having 16 treatment combinations replicated thrice in factorial randomized block design. Barley variety Prakhar (K 1055) (K508/NDB1081) was grown with recommended agronomic practices. On the basis of the results emanated from present investigation, it could be concluded that application of 100% RDF + soil application of Zn @ 25 kg ZnSO₄ ha⁻¹ + two foliar application of Fe (0.5%) significantly recorded maximum growth parameters such as plant height (102.00 cm) and number of effective tillers (302.00 m⁻²) and maximum yield attributing characters such as ear length (8.9 cm), number of grains spike⁻¹ (50.75) and test weight (42.497 g). The result showed highest grain yield (59.55 q ha⁻¹), straw yield (69.673 q ha⁻¹), biological yield (129.22 q ha⁻¹) and harvest index (46.08 %) with 100% RDF + soil application of Zn @ 25 kg ZnSO₄ ha⁻¹ + two foliar application of Fe (0.5%) in comparison to all the treatments during 2021-2022.

Keywords: Barley, Iron, Yield and Zinc.

1. Introduction

Barley (*Hordeum vulgare* L.) is one of the most important cereal crop of all over the world as well as in India. It belongs to the family of *Gramineae* (Poaceae) having chromosome number (2n=14). It is one of the most ancient cereal crop. It is paramount cereal crops and due to its adaptability and hardiness, it is regarded as the first cereal crop domesticated for use by humans as food and feed. Barley is known by its vernacular name "Jau" in India

Barley is known for its nutritive value and rich source of proteins and vitamins groups, thus playing crucial role in food security. Barley is ecologically adaptable on a broad scale, it is primarily a crop that thrives in cool climates. It requires cool weather during early growth and warm and dry weather at maturity. Barley can sustain better under unfavourable weather conditions compared to other cereal crops (Vangool and Vernon, 2006). Barley can be grown

on variety of soils ranging from light sandy to heavy clay soils. It performs well on properly drained loamy soils having a pH range of 7-8. Fertile deep loam and well-drained soil is ideal for barley. Barley is considered as a poor's man crop because of its low input requirements and better adaptability to extremities like salinity, drought, alkalinity and marginal lands (**FAO, 2002**).

Micronutrient deficiencies, particularly in zinc and iron, are a result of exploitative agriculture practices involving contemporary production technology, the introduction of high yielding sweet corn, and the use of high analysis fertilisers. In the future, it might become a worrying condition in the heavily farmed areas. A little more than half of the world's population has micronutrient malnutrition, which primarily results from low dietary intake of micronutrients in diets with a limited variety of foods. According to recent reports, deficiencies in Zn and Fe cause the deaths of over 5,000 children under the age of five every year. Iron and zinc are essential minerals for humans. Deficiencies in both contribute to severe cases of malnutrition.

Among micronutrients, Zinc deficiency is occurring in both crops and humans (**Hotz and Brown, 2004**). Zn deficiency in humans is currently recognized as a leading global risk factor for health and cause of mortality. Zinc solubility in soil is less, resulting in its low concentration in plants and has become the major problem across the countries (**Alloway 2009**). Zinc plays fundamental role in various metabolic processes. It is essential for several biochemical processes in the plant such as cytochrome and nucleotide synthesis, auxin metabolism, chlorophyll production, enzyme activation and membrane integrity.

Iron is also playing a vital role in human health. It is essential nutrient because it is a central part of hemoglobin, which carries oxygen in the blood. It acts as a co-factor for several enzymes performing basic functions in human body. In plants, Fe helps in the formation of chlorophyll. **Ramana et al., (2006)** reported that most of the photosynthetic pathways depend on enzymes and coenzymes which are synthesized by micronutrients. Zn and Fe are essential for several enzymes that regulate metabolic activities in plants. Amongst the different methods; the foliar spray of micronutrients is efficient for enhancement of crop productivity. The practice of intentionally increasing the concentration of key micronutrients, such as vitamins and minerals (including trace elements), in a food to improve the nutritional quality of the food supply and give a public health benefit with low risk to health is known as fortification. Plant breeding, agronomic practices, and contemporary biotechnology techniques are all used to improve the

nutritional value of food crops in the process of biofortification. Agronomic fortification, a quick and easy solution to the issue, is the enhancement of a specific nutrient by addition of fertilizer soil or to foliage in the proper form, timing, and growth stages of the crop. **Narwal et al., (2010)** reported that maximum increase in grain yield was achieved when the recommended dose of ZnSO_4 , at 25 kg ha^{-1} was applied as soil application and 0.5% foliar spray of ZnSO_4 . **Yadav and Chhipa (2007)** reported that application of 50% GR iron pyrite showed significant improvement in both grain and straw yield of wheat, registering an increase of 16.7 per cent over control. Keeping in view the significance of zinc and iron on productivity parameters of barley present investigation was undertaken at the C.S. Azad University of Agriculture and Technology, Kanpur, Uttar Pradesh.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1 Experimental Site: The field experiment was carried out during the *Rabi* season of 2021–2022 at Chandra Shekhar Azad University of Agriculture and Technology, Kanpur on field no. 29, Students' Instructional Farm (SIF). The experimental field had a regular topography, good drainage, and a tube well that provided a reliable source of water. The farm is located in central U.P., India, on the alluvial belt of the gangetic plain.

2.2 Geographical Location

District Kanpur Nagar is situated in the Indo-Gangetic plains of central Uttar Pradesh at an altitude of 125.9 m above sea level. It is in the subtropical and semi-arid zone between the parallels of $25^{\circ}26'$ and $26^{\circ}58'$ north latitude and $79^{\circ}31'$ and $80^{\circ}34'$ east longitude.

2.3 Edaphic Condition

The soil was moist, well drained with uniform plane topography. The soil of the experimental field was alluvial in origin, sandy loam in texture and slightly alkaline in reaction having pH 8.10 (1:2.5 soil: water suspension method given by **Jackson, 1973**), electrical conductivity 0.27 dSm^{-1} (1:2.5 soil: water suspension method given by **Jackson, 1973**), low in organic carbon percentage in soil is 0.390 per cent (Walkley and Black's rapid titration method given by **Walkley and Black, 1934**), low in available nitrogen $175.497 \text{ kg ha}^{-1}$ (Alkaline permanganate method given by **Subbiah and Asija, 1956**), medium in available phosphorus as sodium bicarbonate-extractable P was 12.78 kg ha^{-1} (Olsen's calorimetrically method, **Olsen et al., 1954**), medium in

available potassium was 147.200 kg ha⁻¹ (Flame photometer method given by **Hanwey and Heidel, 1952**), low in available zinc was 0.527 ppm (DTPA extraction method given by **(Lindsay and Norvell, 1978)** and low in available iron was 3.900 ppm (DTPA extraction method given by **(Lindsay and Norvell, 1978)**).

2.4 Experimental Details

The experiment was laid out in Factorial randomized block design and replicated thrice. Here are four methods of Zn i.e. Zn₀ (No Zn), Zn₁ (one spraying @ 0.5% ZnSO₄), Zn₂ (two spraying @ 0.5% ZnSO₄), Zn₃ (soil application @ 25 kg ZnSO₄ ha⁻¹) and four methods of Fe i.e. Fe₀ (No Fe), Fe₁ (one spraying @ 0.5% FeSO₄), Fe₂ (two spraying @ 0.5% FeSO₄), Fe₃ (soil application @ 10 kg FeSO₄ ha⁻¹) comprising with 16 treatment combinations.

Table no.-1: Treatment details

S.No.	Treatments	Treatment Combinations
1	T ₁	(Zn ₀ Fe ₀) Control
2	T ₂	(Zn ₀ Fe ₁) No Zn + Fe (one foliar spraying)
3	T ₃	(Zn ₀ Fe ₂) No Zn + Fe (two foliar spraying)
4	T ₄	(Zn ₀ Fe ₃) No Zn + Fe (soil application)
5	T ₅	(Zn ₁ Fe ₀) Zn(one foliar spraying) + No Fe
6	T ₆	(Zn ₁ Fe ₁) Zn (one foliar spraying) + Fe (one foliar spraying)
7	T ₇	(Zn ₁ Fe ₂) Zn (one foliar spraying) + Fe (two foliar spraying)
8	T ₈	(Zn ₁ Fe ₃) Zn (one foliar spraying) + Fe (soil application)
9	5	(Zn ₂ Fe ₀) Zn (two foliar spraying) + No Fe
10	T ₁₀	(Zn ₂ Fe ₁) Zn (two foliar spraying) + Fe (one foliar spraying)
11	T ₁₁	(Zn ₂ Fe ₂) Zn (two foliar spraying) + Fe (two foliar spraying)
12	T ₁₂	(Zn ₂ Fe ₃) Zn (two foliar spraying) + Fe (soil application)
13	T ₁₃	(Zn ₃ Fe ₀) Zn (soil application) + No Fe
14	T ₁₄	(Zn ₃ Fe ₁) Zn (soil application) + Fe (one foliar spraying)
15	T ₁₅	(Zn ₃ Fe ₂) Zn (soil application) + Fe (two foliar spraying)
16	T ₁₆	(Zn ₃ Fe ₃) Zn (soil application) + Fe (soil application)

* Recommended dose of NPK @ 60:30:20 kg ha⁻¹ was applied uniformly to each treatment.

2.5.2 Fertilizer application: All plots received a basal dressing of 30 kg of nitrogen, 30 kg of phosphorous, and 20 kg of potassium, respectively, by the use of urea, diammonium phosphate, and muriate of potash. The remaining half of the nitrogen dose was delivered to the standing crop during the initial irrigation. Zinc and iron were applied by soil application and spraying as per treatment through Zinc sulphate and ferrous sulphate respectively.

2.5.3 Seed and sowing: A seed rate of 100 kg per hectare of barley variety Prakhar (K 1055) (K508/NDB1081) was used and sowed on 04 December 2021. Row to row distance was 22.5 cm. Seeds were sown at a depth of about 3 to 5 cm.

2.5.6 Harvesting: When the plants turned yellow and dried up, on April 10, 2022, the crop was harvested. After measuring the weight of the air-dried bundles with a spring balance, the harvested crop was tied in labelled bundles and threshed using a tractor-drawn thresher. Plot-by-plot records of the grain and straw yields were made and translated to q/ha.

2.6 Observations recorded

2.6.1 Biological yield ($q\ ha^{-1}$): The bundle weight of each plot was recorded three days after harvest with the help of electronic balance and was converted into q/ha to express biological yield.

2.6.2 Grain yield ($q\ ha^{-1}$): The total weight of clean and dried grains from each plot was weighed with the help of electronic balance in kg/ha and converted into q/ha.

2.6.3 Straw yield ($q\ ha^{-1}$): Straw yield of each plot can be obtained by deducting the grain yield from the respective biological yield and expressed in q/ha.

2.6.4 Harvest index (%): The ratio of economic yield (grain yield) to the biological yield (grain and stover yield) was worked out as harvest index with the help of following formula as suggested by **Singh and Stoskopf (1971)**.

$$\text{Harvest index (\%)} = \text{Economical yield (q ha}^{-1}\text{)} / \text{Biological yield (q ha}^{-1}\text{)} \times 100$$

2.7 Statistical Analysis: The data on various characters studied during the course of investigation were statistically analyzed for factorial randomized block design. Wherever treatment differences were significant ("F" test), critical differences were worked out at five per

cent probability level. The data obtained during the study were analyzed statistically using the methods advocated by **Gomez and Gomez (1984)**.

3. Result and Discussion

3.1. Growth Parameters

Data pertaining to growth parameters mainly no. of plants m^{-2} , no. of effective tillers m^{-2} , plant height (cm), are presented in table no. 2 clearly revealed that application of Zn and Fe in different modes increased these attributes significantly over control. Soil application of Zn @ 25 kg $ZnSO_4 ha^{-1}$ showed its superiority on increase in growth parameters over two foliar application of Zn (0.5 %) and one foliar application of Zn (0.5 %). Maximum no. of plants 101.248 per m^2 , no. of effective tillers 295.750 m^{-2} , plant height 99.50 cm was recorded with soil application of Zn @ 25 kg $ZnSO_4 ha^{-1}$ which was 10.95 %, 7.83 % and 4.18 % higher than the yield of its respective control while two foliar application of Fe (0.5 %) showed maximum increase in growth parameters over soil application of Fe @ 10 kg $FeSO_4 ha^{-1}$ and one foliar application of Fe (0.5%). Maximum no. of plants 99.373 per m^2 , no. of effective tillers 290.251 m^2 , plant height 98.999 cm was recorded with two foliar application of Fe (0.5 %) which was 8.16%, 3.66 % and 3.66 % higher than the yield of its respective control. Likewise, Zn and Fe application in different modes their interaction also influenced the growth parameters but the increase in growth parameters was found non-significant except in the case of plant population (m^{-2}). Maximum increase in growth parameters was recorded with soil application of Zn @ 25 kg $ZnSO_4 ha^{-1}$ and two foliar application of Fe (0.5%). **Gill and Singh (2009)** stated that the foliar use of micronutrients particularly Fe proved highly economical than their soil application. The increase in growth parameters of barley might be due to increased cell expansion and various metabolic process in the presence of adequate available nutrients. These findings are further supported by **Ramana et al., (2006)**. The increase in growth parameters due to Zn application has also been reported by **Ghatak et al. (2005)**, **Kenbaev and Sade (2002)**, **Arora and Singh (2004)**, **Kerum et al., (2012)**, **Boonchuay et al., (2013)**. The increase in growth parameters due to application of Fe in different modes has been reported by **Kulandaivel et al., (2004)**. These findings are further supported by **Sarangi et al., (2006)**.

Table no.-2: Effect of Zinc and Iron on growth parameters of barley

Level of Zn	Levels of Fe				Mean
	Fe ₀	Fe ₁	Fe ₂	Fe ₃	
	Plant population (m ⁻²)				
Zn ₀	87.50	90.01	94.99	92.50	91.25
Zn ₁	89.99	92.50	97.50	95.00	93.74
Zn ₂	92.50	95.00	100.00	97.50	96.25
Zn ₃	97.49	99.99	105.00	102.50	101.24
Mean	91.87	94.37	99.37	96.87	
No. of effective tillers (m ⁻²)					
Zn ₀	268.000	274.000	279.000	275.997	274.249
Zn ₁	278.000	282.000	288.003	284.000	283.001
Zn ₂	284.000	288.003	292.000	290.003	288.502
Zn ₃	290.000	294.000	302.000	297.000	295.750
Mean	280.000	284.501	290.251	286.750	
Plant height (cm)					
Zn ₀	94.003	95.000	97.000	96.000	95.501
Zn ₁	95.000	96.000	97.997	97.000	96.499
Zn ₂	96.003	96.997	99.000	97.997	97.499
Zn ₃	97.000	98.000	102.000	101.000	99.500
Mean	95.502	96.499	98.999	97.999	
		Zn	Fe	Zn x Fe	
Plant population (m ⁻²)	S.E(m)±	0.519	0.519	1.038	
	CD(p=0.05)	1.506	1.506	3.011	
No. of effective tillers (m ⁻²)	S.E(m)±	1.705	1.705	3.41	
	CD(p=0.05)	4.949	4.949	NS	
Plant height (cm)	S.E(m)±	0.471	0.471	0.942	
	CD(p=0.05)	1.367	1.367	NS	

3.2. Yield Components

Data pertaining to yield attributing parameters mainly ear length (cm), no. of grains spikes⁻¹ and test weight (1000 grains) are presented in table no. 3 clearly revealed that application of Zn and Fe in different modes increased these attributes significantly over control. Soil application of Zn @ 25 kg ZnSO₄ ha⁻¹ showed its superiority on increase in yield attributing parameters over two foliar application of Zn (0.5 %) and one foliar application of Zn (0.5 %). Soil application of Zn @ 25 kg ZnSO₄ ha⁻¹ showed its superiority on increase in growth parameters over two foliar

application of Zn (0.5 %) and one foliar application of Zn (0.5 %). Maximum ear length 8.625 cm, no. of grains spikes⁻¹ 51.502 , test weight 41.312 g was recorded with soil application of Zn @ 25 kg ZnSO₄ ha⁻¹ while two foliar application of Fe (0.5 %) showed maximum increase in growth parameters over soil application of Fe @ 10 kg FeSO₄ ha⁻¹ and one foliar application of Fe (0.5 %). Maximum ear length 7.600 cm, no. of grains spikes⁻¹ 50.750, test weight 41.299 g was recorded with two foliar application of Fe (0.5%). Likewise, Zn and Fe application in different modes their interaction also influenced the yield components but the increase in yield components was found non-significant except in the case of ear length. Maximum increase in yield components was recorded with soil application of Zn @ 25 kg ZnSO₄ ha⁻¹ and two foliar application of Fe (0.5%). These findings are further supported by Sarangi *et al.*, (2006) and Gill and Singh (2009).

Table no.-3: Effect of Zinc and Iron on yield attributing characters of barley

Level of Zn	Levels of Fe				Mean
	Fe ₀	Fe ₁	Fe ₂	Fe ₃	
	Ear length (cm)				
Zn ₀	6.600	6.000	6.400	6.203	6.301
Zn ₁	6.300	6.803	7.200	7.100	6.851
Zn ₂	7.300	7.600	7.900	7.800	7.650
Zn ₃	8.200	8.600	8.900	8.800	8.625
Mean	7.100	7.251	7.600	7.476	
Number of grains spike⁻¹					
Zn ₀	40.000	43.000	47.000	45.000	43.750
Zn ₁	44.000	47.000	49.997	48.000	47.249
Zn ₂	47.000	49.000	52.003	50.000	49.501
Zn ₃	49.000	51.003	54.000	52.003	51.502
Mean	45.000	47.501	50.750	48.751	
Test weight (g)					
Zn ₀	36.200	37.800	39.600	38.700	38.075
Zn ₁	38.750	40.150	41.200	40.850	40.238
Zn ₂	39.700	40.400	41.900	41.200	40.800
Zn ₃	40.200	40.750	42.497	41.800	41.312
Mean	38.713	39.775	41.299	40.638	
		Zn	Fe	Zn x Fe	
Ear length (cm)	S.E(m)±	0.046	0.046	0.092	
	CD(p=0.05)	0.134	0.134	0.267	
Number of grains spike ⁻¹	S.E(m)±	0.239	0.239	0.479	
	CD(p=0.05)	0.695	0.695	NS	

Test weight (g)	S.E(m)±	0.239	0.239	0.477	
	CD(p=0.05)	0.693	0.693	NS	

3.3 Productivity Parameters

It was observed that application of different methods of Zn and Fe both enhanced the grain yield, straw yield and biological yield of barley significantly over its control except harvest index which increased non-significantly present in table no. 4. Maximum grain yield 56.650 q ha⁻¹, straw yield 66.703 q ha⁻¹, biological yield 123.351 q ha⁻¹ was recorded with soil application of Zn @ 25 kg ZnSO₄ ha⁻¹ which were found 17.77 %, 14.94 % and 16.22 % higher to its control. Two foliar application of Zn (0.5 %) produce grain yield 54.338 q ha⁻¹, straw yield 64.188 q ha⁻¹ and biological yield 118.523 q ha⁻¹ which was 12.96 %, 10.60 % and 11.67 % higher than the yield of its respective control. A significant increase in grain yield with the application of Zn in different modes was reported by **Kumar and Verma (2008)**, **Pooniya and Shivay (2013)**, **Singh (2017)**. Addition of Fe in different mode also influenced grain, straw and biological yield significantly over control. Highest grain yield 55.087 q ha⁻¹, straw yield 64.996 q ha⁻¹ and biological yield 120.083 q ha⁻¹ was recorded with two foliar application of Fe (0.5 %) which was found 12.77 %, 8.68 % and 9.45 % over control. Soil application of Fe@ 10 kg FeSO₄ ha⁻¹ produced grain yield 53.700 q ha⁻¹, straw yield 63.625 q ha⁻¹ and biological yield 117.323 q ha⁻¹ which was 7.58 %, 6.39 % and 6.94 % over control. Most of the research on methods of Fe application have shown the superiority of foliar application over soil application. These findings are in the line of the findings of **Duraisamy and Mani (2001)**, **Sakal (2001)**, **Ramana et al., (2006)** and **Habib (2009)**. Likewise, Zn and Fe application alone in different modes their interactions also increased grain, straw yield, biological yield but increase in grain, straw and biological yield with combined application of Zn and Fe in different mode was found non-significant. The highest grain yield 59.550 q ha⁻¹, straw yield 69.673 q ha⁻¹ and biological yield 129.220 q ha⁻¹ was recorded with soil application of Zn @ 25 kg ZnSO₄ ha⁻¹ and two foliar application of Fe (0.5 %) which was found 28.75 %, 23.4.8 % and 25.85 % higher to its respective control. These findings are further supported by the findings of **Duraisamy and Mani (2001)**, **Ram Sakal (2001)**, **Babaeian et al., (2012)** and **Singh (2017)**.

Table no.-4: Effect of Zinc and Iron on productivity parameters of barley

Level of Zn	Levels of Fe	Mean
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	Fe₀	Fe₁	Fe₂	Fe₃	
	Grain yield (q ha⁻¹)				
Zn₀	46.250	47.400	49.850	48.900	48.100
Zn₁	49.050	50.753	53.897	52.550	51.563
Zn₂	51.250	53.600	57.050	55.450	54.338
Zn₃	53.100	56.050	59.550	57.900	56.650
Mean	49.912	51.951	55.087	53.700	
	Straw yield (q ha⁻¹)				
Zn₀	56.423	57.307	59.567	58.827	58.031
Zn₁	58.813	60.497	63.653	62.323	61.322
Zn₂	60.937	63.407	67.090	65.320	64.188
Zn₃	63.030	66.080	69.673	68.030	66.703
Mean	59.801	61.823	64.996	63.625	
	Biological yield (q ha⁻¹)				
Zn₀	102.673	104.700	109.420	107.720	106.128
Zn₁	107.857	111.240	117.550	114.870	112.879
Zn₂	112.180	117.000	124.140	120.770	118.523
Zn₃	116.120	122.133	129.220	125.930	123.351
Mean	109.708	113.768	120.083	117.323	
	Harvest index (%)				
Zn₀	45.040	45.270	45.547	45.387	45.311
Zn₁	45.467	45.617	45.853	45.740	45.669
Zn₂	45.680	45.807	45.950	45.910	45.837
Zn₃	45.723	45.890	46.080	45.970	45.916
Mean	45.478	45.646	45.858	45.752	
		Zn	Fe	Zn x Fe	
Grain yield	S.E(m)±	0.327	0.327	0.654	
	CD(p=0.05)	0.950	0.950	NS	
Straw yield	S.E(m)±	0.359	0.359	0.718	
	CD(p=0.05)	1.041	1.041	NS	
Biological yield	S.E(m)±	0.699	0.699	1.398	
	CD(p=0.05)	2.028	2.028	NS	
Harvest index	S.E(m)±	0.258	0.258	0.515	

5. Conclusion

The experimental results indicated that superiority in regard to growth parameters, yield components and productivity parameters *viz*, grain yield (q ha⁻¹), straw yield (q ha⁻¹), biological yield (q ha⁻¹) and harvest index (%) with the use of treatment combination 100 % RDF + soil application of Zn @ 25 kg ZnSO₄ ha⁻¹ + two foliar application of Fe (0.5 %) gave in soil ensure

highest growth parameters, yield components and productivity, of barley crop as comparison to all the treatments during 2021-2022.

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