

Original Research Article

Effect of seed pelleting with *Rhizobium* and nutrition management on growth parameters of cowpea [*Vigna unguiculata* (L.) Walp.]

Abstract

An experiment was laid out in a Randomized Block Design (Factorial) with different pelleting material i.e. no pelleting (P₁), *Rhizobium* liquid (P₂), *Rhizobium* powder (P₃) and *Rhizobium* liquid with jaggery (P₄) and 5 levels of nitrogen application i.e. 0% N of recommended dose of fertilizer (RDF) (F₁), 40% N of RDF (F₂), 60% N of RDF (F₃), 80% N of RDF (F₄) and 100% N of RDF (F₅), altogether 20 treatment combinations of seed pelleting and nitrogen replicated thrice to find out effect on growth parameters i.e. emergence %, days to 50% flowering, plant height, number of branches per plant, number of pods per plant and number of seeds per pod of cowpea cv. Himachal Lobia-1. Among different pelleting treatments, seed pelleting with *Rhizobium* liquid exhibited better results over other treatments and all growth parameters affect significantly by pelleting treatments. Different level of nitrogen application also had significant effect on growth parameters. 80% N of recommended dose of fertilizer was best treatment over other treatments. Interaction effect of seed pelleting and nitrogen application was non-significant on growth parameters except number of branches per plant. Maximum number of branches was found in P₂F₄ (*Rhizobium* liquid + 80% N of RDF) treatment.

Keywords: Legume crop, nitrogen fixation, seed pelleting, nitrogen application, Cowpea, *Rhizobium*, pelleting, Himachal Lobia-1, emergence %, vegetative growth

1. Introduction

Cowpea [*Vigna unguiculata* (L.) Walp.] is one of the most important crops which is grown commercially as a grain crop, animal fodder and vegetable crop [1] in the semi-arid regions of Africa, Asia, Southern Europe, Southern United States, and Central and South America

[2,3,4]. It belongs to family **Fabaceae** and is native of South-Africa [5]. The vast majority of the world's cowpea production (over 95%) takes place in sub-Saharan Africa with about 12.5 million hectares under cultivation worldwide in 2014. Asia is the second largest producing region, representing less than 3% of the global production in average over the 1993-2014 periods. **In world, approximately over 8 million tons during the year 2019 was produced [6].**

It is a crop of major importance to the nutrition of poor rural households whose diets tend to heavily rely on starchy foods such as millet, sorghum, maize and cassava. Therefore, it has a tremendous potential to contribute to the alleviation of malnutrition because it contains carbohydrate and proteins in huge quantity along with less quantity of fats, fiber, B-vitamins such as folic acid, thiamine, riboflavin and niacin and micronutrients such as iron and zinc [7].

Cowpea has ability to fix atmospheric nitrogen in soil at the rate of 56 kg/ha in association with symbiotic bacteria under favorable conditions [8,9] and biological nitrogen fixation leads to noteworthy reduction in production cost incurred on nitrogen fertilizers [10]. **In addition, it can be noted that one-third of the total crop yield is depended on the use of fertilizers, and hence, proper use of fertilizers is highly essential to minimize the cost of production and to reduce environmental pollution that are caused due to excessive use of chemical fertilizers. Chemical fertilizers are also responsible for improper nutrient balance of soil, increased disease and insect-pest resistance, reduced soil microflora, and weakened nitrogen fixation [11].** With a view to make sure the buildup of sufficient bacterial population and to have adequate symbiosis between bacteria and plant roots, *Rhizobium* is applied artificially in many ways like soil and seed applications. The application of *Rhizobium* through seeds in the form of seed pelleting is one of the effective ways to ensure the optimum symbiosis for enhanced crop productivity. Seed pelleting focuses on better establishment and increased productivity by precision sowing and addition of various materials along with filler

material that improve the seed quality in many ways [12]. Keeping in view the above prospective, this study had been planned to determine the effect of seed pelleting with *Rhizobium* and nitrogen application on vegetative growth parameters of cowpea crop.

2. Materials and Methods

The experiment was carried out at farm of Department of Seed Science and Technology, Dr Y S Parmar University of Horticulture and Forestry, Nauni, Solan (HP) is located at an altitude of 1250 meters above mean sea level with latitude of 35.5°N and longitude of 77.8°E in the mid- hill zone of Himachal Pradesh, India. Climate of the area is generally sub-temperate and semi-humid characterized by cold winters. Generally, December and January are the coldest while; May and June are the hottest with moderate rainfall (1000-1300 mm). The soil texture was loam to clay loam having pH ranging from 6.85-7.05. The soil had fertility status of 279.25 kg nitrogen/ha, 30.25 kg phosphorus/ha and 355.28 kg potassium/ha.

Table 1. Meteorological data on rainfall, temperature and relative humidity during the course of investigation

MONTH	MEAN TEMPERATURE (°C)	MEAN RAINFALL (mm)	RELATIVE HUMIDITY (%)
June	38.05	91.1	60
July	38.20	294.40	79
August	38.05	102.20	80
September	36.75	41.60	68
October	19.65	34.60	58

Source: Meteorological Observatory, Department of Environmental Sciences, Dr. Y S Parmar University of Horticulture and Forestry, Nauni-173 230, Solan (HP)

Genetically pure seed of cowpea cv. Himachal Lobia-1 was purchased from Directorate of Extension Education, Dr Y S P University of Horticulture and Forestry, Nauni, Solan. Liquid and powder form of *Rhizobium* culture (*Rhizobium leguminosarum*) was obtained from Soil microbiology laboratory of Department of Soil Science and water management, UHF Nauni, Solan. Seed pelleting was done at CSIR-IHBT (Institute of Himalayan Bioresource Technology) Palampur, Himachal Pradesh. For seed pelleting clay and adhesive (45% Gum

Arabica) was used. There were total 20 treatment combinations (4 level of seed pelleting i.e. P₁-Control, P₂-*Rhizobium* liquid + clay + adhesive, P₃- *Rhizobium* powder + clay + adhesive, P₄- *Rhizobium* liquid formulation + jaggary and 5 level of nitrogen application i.e. F₁-0 % Nitrogen of Recommended dose of fertilizer, F₂ -40% N of RDF, F₃ -60% N of RDF, F₄ -80% N of RDF, F₅ -100% N of RDF) and each treatment was replicated three times so there were total 60 plots of 1.8m × 1.5m (i.e. 2.7 m²) size. There were total 40 plants in every plot and spacing was 45cm × 15cm. Urea is applied to these plots and recommended dose for cowpea is 45 kg/hectare. Cultural practices were done according to package of practices for vegetable crops, Directorate of Extension Education, Dr Y S Parmar University of Horticulture and Forestry, Nauni, Solan (HP). Recorded observations were emergence %, days to 50% flowering, plant height, number of branches per plant, number of pods per plant and number of seeds per pod. The statistical analysis for RBD was done as per design of experiment as suggested by [13]

3. Results and discussion

Emergence percentage of cowpea seeds was significantly affected by different seed pelleting with *Rhizobium* treatments and different dose of nitrogen application. When seeds were pelleted with *Rhizobium* (liquid form), emergence percentage was maximum (93%) and non-pelleted seeds shown only 89.67% emergence in field condition. Seed pelleted with dry form of *Rhizobium* gave 91.17% emergence. Among different dose of nitrogen application, 80% N of RDF (F₄) gave maximum (92.50%) emergence and minimum (89.79%) emergence was found in control (0% N of RDF). Interaction effect of seed pelleting and nitrogen application was non-significant on emergence of cowpea seeds. It might be due to continuous supply of nutrients to seeds present in pelleting material which helped in survival of seedlings. Similar increased emergence due to seed pelleting was also found by Raj [14] in cowpea. Such beneficial influence (higher germination percentage) of seed pelleting with *Rhizobium* was

also found in Bengal gram, Moth beans, and Green gram and peas by Pawar *et al.* [15]. The hike in germination also could be attributed to higher cytokinin production due to biofertilizer which led to higher cell division. Ahmed *et al.* [16] also reported increased germination in French bean due to seed pelleting with *Rhizobium*.

Table 2: Effect of seed pelleting and nitrogen application and their interaction on growth parameters of cowpea

Treatment	Total emergence (%)	Days to 50% flowering	Plant height	Number of branches per plant	Number of seeds per pod	Number of pods per plant	Number of seeds per plant
Seed pelleting							
P₁	89.67 (9.52)	41.08	83.80	3.86	12.25	12.90	158.05
P₂	93.00 (9.70)	40.33	90.18	4.44	12.90	14.05	181.24
P₃	91.17 (9.60)	40.61	89.28	4.25	12.64	13.39	169.31
P₄	90.67 (9.57)	40.85	85.54	4.24	12.39	13.36	165.51
CD_{0.05}	0.06	0.38	0.43	0.08	0.20	0.16	3.08
Nitrogen application							
F₁	89.79 (9.53)	40.98	86.32	4.00	12.27	13.06	160.40
F₂	90.63 (9.57)	41.01	86.74	4.07	12.43	13.31	165.45
F₃	91.25 (9.60)	40.93	87.10	4.18	12.50	13.43	167.98
F₄	92.50 (9.67)	40.33	88.11	4.41	12.87	13.72	176.58
F₅	91.46 (9.62)	40.34	87.72	4.31	12.65	13.61	172.21
CD_{0.05}	0.07	0.43	0.48	0.09	0.23	0.18	3.44
Interaction (P × F)							
P₁F₁	88.33 (9.45)	41.32	82.93	3.80	11.99	12.60	151.10
P₂F₁	90.83 (9.58)	40.34	89.36	4.19	12.71	13.40	170.23
P₃F₁	90.83 (9.58)	41.42	88.25	4.05	12.29	13.07	160.67
P₄F₁	89.17 (9.50)	40.82	84.74	3.96	12.10	13.19	159.61
P₁F₂	89.17 (9.50)	41.12	83.00	3.86	12.17	12.77	155.40
P₂F₂	91.67 (9.63)	40.75	89.46	4.21	12.83	13.82	177.28

P₃F₂	90.83 (9.58)	40.94	89.13	4.11	12.33	13.39	165.10
P₄F₂	90.83 (9.58)	41.22	85.38	4.10	12.39	13.24	164.03
P₁F₃	89.17 (9.50)	41.87	83.33	3.84	12.26	12.90	158.20
P₂F₃	93.33 (9.71)	40.75	90.14	4.53	12.88	14.07	181.20
P₃F₃	90.83 (9.58)	40.37	89.41	4.15	12.44	13.44	167.23
P₄F₃	91.67 (9.63)	40.72	85.52	4.21	12.43	13.30	165.31
P₁F₄	91.67 (9.63)	40.31	85.22	3.95	12.49	13.14	164.05
P₂F₄	95.00 (9.80)	40.03	91.20	4.67	13.09	14.53	190.12
P₃F₄	91.67 (9.63)	39.90	89.87	4.55	13.33	13.57	180.81
P₄F₄	91.67 (9.63)	41.08	86.16	4.47	12.56	13.65	171.35
P₁F₅	90.00 (9.54)	40.76	84.50	3.85	12.35	13.07	161.50
P₂F₅	94.17 (9.76)	39.80	90.74	4.58	12.99	14.43	187.37
P₃F₅	91.67 (9.63)	40.39	89.73	4.37	12.80	13.49	172.74
P₄F₅	90.00 (9.54)	40.42	85.92	4.46	12.45	13.43	167.23
CD_{0.05}	NS	NS	NS	0.17	NS	NS	NS
P ₁ -Control, P ₂ - <i>Rhizobium</i> liquid + clay + adhesive, P ₃ - <i>Rhizobium</i> powder + clay + adhesive, P ₄ - <i>Rhizobium</i> liquid formulation + jaggary F ₁ -0 % N of RDF, F ₂ -40 % N of RDF, F ₃ -60 % N of RDF, F ₄ -80 % N of RDF, F ₅ -100 % N of RDF Figures in parenthesis are square root transformed.							

Different types of pelleting and different doses of nitrogen had significant effect on days to 50% flowering of cowpea. Among different pelleting methods, minimum (40.33) days for 50% flowering was taken when seed were pelleted with liquid form of *Rhizobium* and maximum (41.08) days was taken when seeds were not pelleted. Among different dose of nitrogen application, 50% of flowering was first occurred when 80% N of RDF was applied and maximum days for 50% flowering when 40% N of RDF was applied. Interaction effect of seed pelleting and nitrogen application was non-significant on days to 50% flowering.

Reduction in days to 50% flowering might be attributed to the fact that pelleted seeds germinated early leading to faster vegetative growth of plant and flowering growth started early in comparison to plants which were germinated from non-pelleted seeds. Nitrogen is known to stimulate vegetative growth therefore, days to 50% flowering increased with increase in nitrogen dose. Reduced days to 50% flowering due to seed pelleting with *Rhizobium* was also reported by Patel and Jadav [17] in cowpea cv. Pusa Phalguni.

Plant height of cowpea was increased when seeds were pelleted with *Rhizobium* and maximum (90.18 cm) plant height was obtained when seed were pelleted with liquid form of *Rhizobium* and minimum (83.80 cm) was found in control (P₁). Different level of nitrogen application had also significant effect on plant height of cowpea. 80% N of RDF gave maximum (88.11 cm) plant height and minimum (86.32 cm) was found in control (0% N of RDF) treatment. Interaction effect of seed pelleting and nitrogen application on plant height of cowpea was non-significant. This may be attributed to the fact that pelleting material maintained nutritive reserve and dehydrogenase activity in seeds and nitrogen is an essential part of chlorophyll and nucleic acids, which might have played major role in promoting plant growth in terms of plant height, number of branches per plant, number of seeds per pod etc. hike in plant height due to seed pelleting with *Rhizobium* was also reported by Khaitov *et al.* [18] in chickpea. Increased plant height due to nitrogen application was also reported by Upadhyay and Singh [19] in cowpea and by Starling *et al.* [20] in soybean.

Number of branches per plant was affected significantly by seed pelleting and different dose of nitrogen application. Minimum number of branches was obtained when seeds were not pelleted and 0% N of RDF was applied. When seeds were pelleted with liquid form of *Rhizobium*, maximum (4.44) branches per plant was obtained. In non-pelleted seeds there were only 3.86 (minimum) branches per plant. Increment in nitrogen dose up to 80% N of RDF also increase number of branches per plant. Minimum number of branches was found

when nitrogen was not applied. Interaction of seed pelleting and nitrogen application also affected number of branches significantly. Maximum number of branches per plant (4.67) was found in P₂F₄ (*Rhizobium* culture pelleting + 80% N of RDF) which was at par with P₂F₃ (4.53) and P₂F₅ (4.58). However, minimum number of branches per plant (3.80) was found in P₁F₁ (control + 0% N of RDF). This might be due to constant and optimal supply of nitrogen and other nutrients under *Rhizobium* treatments which led to more plant height and plants with more height bear a greater number of branches. Similar results of increased number of branches per plant due to seed inoculation with *Rhizobium* and nitrogen application was reported by Yadav and Malik [21] in cowpea.

Number of seeds per pod and pods per plant were increased when seeds were pelleted with *Rhizobium*. Maximum number of seed per pod and pods per plant was obtained when liquid form of *Rhizobium* was used for seed pelleting over other treatments and minimum numbers were found in control (P₁). Different dose of nitrogen application also affected these growth parameters significantly. 80% N of RDF (F₄) produced maximum seeds per pods and pods per plant and in control (F₁) treatment. Interaction effect of seed pelleting and nitrogen application was non-significant on number of pods per plant and seeds per pod. The production of more pods per plant and seeds per pod with application of higher doses of nitrogen in comparison to lower doses and/or with no nitrogen also could be attributed to the fact that more biomass in terms of vegetative growth might have been put up with higher levels of nitrogen and nitrogen is known to stimulate vegetative growth and it might be also due to more number of flowers. Similar results of increased number of pods per plant due to seed pelleting with *Rhizobium* and nitrogen application were reported by Swaroop *et al.* [22] in cowpea cv. Arka Garima.

Different type of seed pelleting and different dose of nitrogen application had significant effect on number of seeds per plant. Number of seeds per plant was increased by

14.67% when seeds were pelleted with liquid form of *Rhizobium* over control. Among different dose of nitrogen, 80% N of RDF gave maximum (176.58) number of seeds per plant which were 10% more of control (F₁). Interaction effect of seed pelleting and nitrogen application was non-significant in number of seeds per plants. The increased number of seeds per plant might be due to seed pelleting with *Rhizobium* and nitrogen doses, more nodulation because of nitrogen and *Rhizobium* pelleting has occurred which led to a greater number of seeds per pod and pods per plant thereby, increase number of seeds per plant. Similar results of increased number of seeds per plant due to nitrogen application were reported by Farahvash and Mirshekari [23] in cowpea.

4. Conclusion

It is concluded that seed of cowpea shows better emergence% and vegetative growth in term of plant height, number of branches, number of pods per plant and number of seeds per pod when they are treated with *Rhizobium*. Better vegetative growth always leads to better seed yield because provide sufficient branches to bear pods and plants face environmental stresses effectively if vegetative growth is good of crops. Still there is always room for improvement and research in every area but cowpea seed treatments with *Rhizobium* could be recommended for sowing in Himachal Pradesh conditions.

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