# Effect of soil zinc and boron on the yield and uptake of wheat in an acid soil of West Bengal, India

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**Abstract:** The production of wheat (*Triticum aestivum* L.), an important staple food in the world, is often restricted due to micronutrients status in soil. Micronutrient deficiency in soil including boron (B) and zinc (Zn) is quite widespread in Asian countries including India due to prevalent soil and environmental conditions. A field experiment was conducted following randomized complete block design over a two-year period in an acid soil of *Terai* region of West Bengal to study the effect of zinc and boron on the yield and uptake of nutrients by wheat. The highest grain yield (4.4 t $ha^{-1}$) was obtained after the combined application of Zn and B over that of other treatment combinations (variable rates of B and Zn application with nutrients) or control (no nutrients, B and Zn). Application of one micronutrient might have accelerated the uptake of other micro- and macro-nutrients (such as B, Zn, nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium) resulting in higher yield. A positive correlation was observed between the grain yield and the uptake of different nutrients with the weakest with Zn. A enhancement of the nutrients in soils was also observed at the harvest. High response from a combined application of B and Zn clearly demonstrated the necessity of micronutrients for improving production in the studied regions with acid soils. Therefore, an application of a mixture of micronutrients is recommended over a single micronutrient for the acid soil regions of West Bengal in order to get a better response from the applied nutrient sources and thus the production.

**Key words**: micronutrients, synergistic effect, *Terai* region, deficiency, growth stages

## Introduction

Wheat (*Triticum aestivum* L.) is the most important staple food for humans and is grown on more land than any other commercial crops in the world. It was grown on 216.6 million ha land in 2012 [1] producing 674.9 million tonnes of wheat globally, the third most produced cereal (perhaps any food crop) after maize (875.1 million tonnes) and rice (718.3 million tonnes) [1]. In 2012, India produced 94.9 million tonnes of wheat from a cultivated area of 29.9 million ha, the largest area devoted to wheat production by any country in the world [2].

With the demand of ever-increasing population, the present day agriculture became more intensive and mined available nutrients from soil over years. However, one of the major triggering factors behind the dramatic improvement in the production and yield of wheat was the supply of artificial nutrient source for plant growth and development especially the use of synthetic nitrogen fertilizer. Potash and phosphorus fertilizer in addition to the nitrogen fertilizer supplied the major nutrients for the growth, development and production of wheat. In addition to these major (macro) nutrients, there are some nutrients, which are essential for wheat growth but needed only in very small (micro) quantities. Among these, boron (B), zinc (Zn), iron, (Fe), copper (Cu), manganese (Mn), and chlorine (Cl) are known to have effect on the grain- as well as straw-yield of wheat. These micronutrients play a pivotal role in the yield improvement of wheat crop [3]. They are needed in trace amount while the adequate supply improves nutrient availability and positively affects the cell physiology that is reflected in yield as well [4, 5]. A number of micronutrients are part of the photosynthesis and respiration processes, chlorophyll formation, nucleic acid and protein synthesis, nitrogen-fixation and other biochemical pathways [6-8]. However, the deficiencies of micronutrients are wide spread in many Asian countries including India due to calcareous nature of soils, high pH, low organic matter, salt stress, prolonged draught, high bicarbonate content in irrigation water and imbalanced application of NPK fertilizers [9, 10]. The deficiency of micronutrients can induce the stress in plants including low crop yield and quality, imperfect plant morphological structure (such as fewer xylem vessels of small size), widespread infestation of various diseases and pests and low fertilizer use efficiency.

Zinc is one of the important micronutrients, which is important in the production of various crops including wheat [11, 12]. It improves the number of grains per spike [13]. In addition to the yield [14, 15], adequate supply of Zn can improve the water use efficiency of wheat plants

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[16]. It also provides thermo-tolerance to the photosynthetic apparatus [17]. It is important in plant metabolism and thus the growth and production of wheat [18]. The Zn is the third most common deficient nutrient after N and P [19, 20]. Zinc deficiency in plants not only reduces the grain yield, but also the nutritional quality of crops [21].

Boron is another important micronutrient that is essential for plant growth and improves the production efficiency of wheat. However, the deficiency of B is the most frequently encountered in field [22]. Boron is essential for cell division and elongation of meristematic tissues, floral organs and the flower male fertility, pollen tube germination and its elongation and the seed and fruit formation. Lack of B can cause the 'wheat sterility' resulting in increased number of open spikelets and decreased number of grains per spike [23]. The B deficiency in soil can affect seedling emergence and cause an abnormal cellular development in young wheat plant [24]. It also inhibits root elongation by limiting cell division in the growing zone of root tips [25]. Deficiency of B is known to inhibit the leaf expansion and reduction in photosynthesis. In the field, sexual reproduction is often affected by low B reducing the grain yield significantly without any visual symptoms expressed during vegetative growth.

The *Terai* region is located at the south of the outer foothill of the Himalaya and Siwalik hills and the north of the Indo-Gangetic plain. It spreads over a number of states in India including Himachal Pradesh, Haryana, Uttaranchal, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Sikkim and Assam. It also covers a major part in Nepal, Bhutan and Bangladesh. The *Terai* region is the habitat of millions of people. It is a very productive region and agriculture is the base of the economy of the habitants. Rice and wheat are important crops of this region. The rice-wheat system is the most important cropping pattern in this region and considered to be the major determinant factor of the agriculture-based economy. However, the intensive cultivation practices overexploited the natural soil resource base, which was further enhanced by the imbalanced use of inputs [22, 26].

The deficiency of B and Zn in soils of different agro-climatic zones is not rare and *Terai* region is not an exception in this regard. Deficiency of different micronutrients has been reported from this region. Among the most prevalent ones, the deficiency of Zn is estimated to be the highest [27, 28]. Incidence of B deficiency from the areas of West Bengal and Bihar has also been reported [26]. Comprehensive study on the effect as well as the interaction of these nutrients on the production of wheat at this part of the world would help understanding constraints of cultivation and decreasing the yield gap to secure food for the future.

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Based on the above perspectives the present study was undertaken in the *Terai* region of West Bengal 1) to assess the effect of Zn and B on the yield of wheat, 2)to examine the interaction effect of Zn and B on the yield of wheat and 3) to evaluate the residual status of Zn and B in soil at different stages of wheat crop.

## Materials and Methods

**Experimental site:**

A field experiment was carried out at the agricultural farm of Uttar Banga Krishi Viswavidyalaya,Pundibari, Cooch Behar, West Bengal, India. The farm is located within the *Terai* Agro-climatic zone and its geographic location is 26°19'86" N latitude and 89°23'53" E longitude. The elevation of the farm is 43 meters above the mean sea level. The field experiment was carried out in the same field during the winter season (*Rabi season*) of 2010-11 and 2011-12.

**Experimental plots:**

The local topography of the study area is almost flat with good drainage facilities. The soil of the experimental site is sandy loam in texture (sand- 60%, Silt- 21% and Clay- 19%). Before laying out the experimental plots, a set of surface soil samples was collected over the whole experimental area, composite together and tested in the laboratory following the methods described in the following sub-section. The measured physical, chemical and physico-chemical properties (Table 1) were used as the baseline measurement for the experimental plots.

**Table 1: Initial characteristics of experimental soil for two years**

| Characteristics | Measurements | |
|---|---|---|
| | 2010-11 | 2011-12 |
| pH | 5.00 | 5.00 |
| EC (dS $m^{-1}$) | 0.05 | 0.05 |
| Organic Carbon (%) | 1.04 | 1.02 |
| Nitrogen (kg $ha^{-1}$) | 206.98 | 188.16 |
| Phosphorus (kg $ha^{-1}$) | 0.76 | 0.89 |
| Potassium (kg $ha^{-1}$) | 89.60 | 88.48 |
| Boron (kg $ha^{-1}$) | 0.68 | 0.62 |
| Zinc (kg $ha^{-1}$) | 0.73 | 0.84 |

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A set of 30 experimental plots (5 m × 4 m) were laid out following randomized complete block design (RCBD) for this experiment. Ten treatment combinations (Table 2) were developed following three doses of B (0 kg $ha^{-1}$, 5 kg $ha^{-1}$ and 10 kg $ha^{-1}$), three doses of Zn (0 kg $ha^{-1}$, 12.5 kg Zn Sulphate $ha^{-1}$ and 25 kg Zn Sulphate $ha^{-1}$) and a treatment without application of any nutrients ($T_{10}$). Though the treatment $T_1$ ($B_0Zn_0$) received recommended doses of N, P, and K, treatment $T_{10}$ (control) did not receive any nutrient or micronutrients (B and Zn). The treatments were replicated three times in this field experiment.

**Table 2: Details on the experimental plots and treatment combinations**

| Experimental details | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Crop | : | Wheat (*Triticum aestivum* L.) | |
| Variety | : | NW 1014 | |
| Experimental design | : | Randomized Complete Block Design | |
| Total Area | : | 801 $m^2$ | |
| Plot size | : | 5 m × 4 m | |
| Number of replication | : | 3 | |
| Spacing | : | 23 cm (Row to Row) | |
| Treatments | : | $T_1$-$B_0Zn_0$, $T_2$-$B_0Zn_1$, $T_3$-$B_0Zn_2$, $T_4$-$B_1Zn_0$, $T_5$-$B_1Zn_1$, $T_6$-$B_1Zn_2$, $T_7$-$B_2Zn_0$, $T_8$-$B_2Zn_1$, $T_9$-$B_2Zn_2$, $T_{10}$- Control. | |
| | | $B_0$ = without boron | $Zn_0$ = without zinc sulphate |
| | | $B_1$ = 5 kg $ha^{-1}$ of boron | $Zn_1$ = 12.5 kg $ha^{-1}$of zinc sulphate |
| | | $B_2$ = 10 kg $ha^{-1}$ of boron | $Zn_2$ = 25 kg $ha^{-1}$of zinc sulphate |

**Field operations:**

The land preparation for this experiment was started with a deep ploughing (21 and 22, December 2010 and 12 and 13 December 2012) using a tractor. A laddering (similar to levelling of soil surface) was performed after a day of soil drying following two secondary tillage using a power tiller in order to prepare a good soil tilth. The weeds and stubbles were removed by hand picking and the final laddering was performed to prepare the seed bed. Bunds and channels were prepared manually to prepare the experimental plots following the specifications mentioned in Table 1. Nitrogen (N, 100 kg $ha^{-1}$), phosphorus (P, 60 kg $ha^{-1}$) and potassium (K, 30 kg $ha^{-1}$), in the form of urea, single super phosphate, muriate of potash; B as Borax (10 kg/ha, sodium borate), and Zn as zinc sulphate (25 kg $ha^{-1}$) were applied to the soil as per the treatments. Full dose of P, K, B and Zn and half of the recommended dose of N were surface applied as basal

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dose and incorporated in the soil. The remaining half of the recommended dose of N was applied as top dressing at 21 days after sowing (DAS), after completion of the first weeding.

The wheat variety of NW-104 was used for this experiment at the rate of 100 kg $ha^{-1}$. Sowing was completed in rows (spacing 23 cm) in North-South using a duck-foot tyne at a depth of 2.5 to 3 cm. Two weeding operations were performed manually on 21 DAS and 45 DAS. Two irrigations were applied on 21 DAS (after weeding and fertilizer application) and 65 DAS. The excess water was drained out using drainage channels.

The soil and plant samples were collected for laboratory analysis on 21 (CRI- crown root initiation stage), 55 (tillering stage), 70 (booting stage) and 110 (maturity) DAS. Leaving the border rows, half of the area in each plot was marked for recording biometrical observation including destructive plant sampling and other half for recording yield components and yield of wheat.The height (from ground level) of five randomly selected plants were recorded and averaged from each plot. The measured plants were tagged after first measurement for subsequent measurements. Dry weight of both roots and shoots were also recorded. The number of tillers per $m^2$ was recorded from 10 randomly selected plants. The crop was harvested from net plot area discarding the border row. The number of spikes per plant was recorded from 10 randomly selected plants and converted to number of spikes per $m^2$. Length of spikes was measured prior to harvest and average length was calculated. Number of grains per spikes as well as 1000 grain dry weight were also recorded for each treatment. The final yield of wheat and straw was recorded after sun drying and thrashing. The yields were recorded and calculated as tonne per ha following,

$$\text{Grain yield (t ha}^{-1}\text{)} = (\text{Plot yield (kg)} \times 10000 / \text{Plot size (m}^2\text{)} \times 1000)$$

**Analytical methods:**

Collected soil and plant samples were tested for a series of parameter in laboratory. pH and electrical conductivity (EC) of soil samples was determined in suspensions (soil:water 1:2.5) using a Systronics glass electrode-pH meter and a Systronics digital conductivity meter (Model no. 304), respectively [29].Organic carbon (OC) content of soil samples was estimated by Walkley and Black's titration method [30]. Mechanical analysis of soil samples was carried out following the hydrometer method [31]. The textural class of the soils was ascertained from the particle-size distribution of sand, silt and clay particles. Available nitrogen (N) in soil and plant samples was determined by alkaline $KMnO_4$ method following Subbiah and Asija [32].

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Available P in soil and plant was determined by extracting the samples with a mixture of 0.03 M $NH_4F$ and 0.025 M HCl [33] followed by colorimetric measurement at 880 nm using spectrometer (Systronics Model No. 167) [34]. Available K in soil and plant was measured using a flame photometer (Systronics Model No128) [34]. The extraction was carried out with neutral normal ammonium acetate. DTPA-(Diethylenetriaminepentaacetic acid) extractable $Zn^{+2}$ of soil and plant samples were determined by extraction with the extractant containing 0.005M DTPA, 0.01M $CaCl_2$ and 0.1M Triethanol amine buffered at pH 7.3 [35] followed by the measurement using Atomic Absorption Spectrophotometer (AAS). Available Boron in soil and plant was extracted by boiling a known amount of samples with double distilled water (in 1:2.5 ratio) prepared by quartz glass distillation apparatus, for five minutes under a reflux condenser, followed by cooling and filtration [36]. The concentration was measured using AAS.

## Statistical analyses

Statistical analysis for the collected data was performed in SigmaPlot (Systat Software Inc.). The significant difference between the treatments was tested using ANOVA and LSD. The interaction between the effect of B and Zn was tested using two-way ANOVA. The correlation between the yield components and nutrient uptakes were also calculated. The figures were prepared using the SigmaPlot.

## Results and Discussion

The yield components and grain yield of wheat are shown in Table 3. A significant difference was observed among the treatment combinations on yield components and grain yield of wheat. The maximum mean grain yield (4.4 t $ha^{-1}$) was observed in the treatment $T_6$ ($B_1Zn_2$), while minimum was observed in the control (1.7 t $ha^{-1}$). Relatively higher yield was obtained from the treatments $T_1$ ($B_0Zn_0$) to $T_9$ ($B_2Zn_2$) over that of the control ($T_{10}$). The lowest harvest index was observed in $T_4$ ($B_1Zn_0$) and the highest in controls ($T_{10}$). The application of B and Z in combination significantly ($p < 0.05$) increased the grain yield of wheat. The grain yield increase with B and Zn addition was reported by Chaudry et al. [37]. Boron concentration has been reported to increase grain yield of durum wheat by 16% [38]. This may be due to the requirement of B in wheat during the vegetative stage leading to high response to the grain yield [39, 40]. Therefore, even a small amount of Zn and B directly affected the grain yield. Mandal [41] reported a direct relationship between the number of grains and tillers and the wheat yield under B deficient soils of *Terai* region of West Bengal.

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The effect of B on the grain and straw yield was significant at alpha = 0.05 (95% significant level). However, the scenario was little different for Zn. For example, without any addition of B, Zn had no effect on crop yield, while with regular dose of B (5 kg B $ha^{-1}$) application, the yield increased linearly. This indicated that with a regular dose of B, the efficiency of Zn increased (at least for the application rate considered in this study). However, with excess (more than regular) application of B, the effect of Zn decreased indicating antagonistic effect between the micronutrient at high dose, specifically B. The two-way ANOVA following a general linear model with alpha = 0.05 showed a significant interaction between the effect of B and Zn on the grain and straw yield of wheat. This means that the difference in the mean values among the different levels of B and Zn is great enough to exclude the possibility that the difference is just not due to random sampling variability after allowing for the effects of differences in Zn and B, respectively. Therefore, care should be taken in deciding the amount of micronutrient application, which may have different effect. From this study, it could be suggested to choose a regular dose of B for better efficiency of Zn. Sometime a high dose of Zn could be even beneficial with a controlled application of B.

In spite of the highest dry biomass production until the booting stage in $T_6$ ($B_1Zn_2$), the $T_8$ ($B_2Zn_1$) produced the highest dry straw at maturity (Fig. 1). Combination of B and Zn might have boosted the vegetative growth during the early stage, while the high amount of Zn along with a regular dose of B improved the yield and yield components of wheat at maturity [14, 15]. A combination of regular dose of Zn and B ($T_5$) could not produce high amount of straw compared to other treatments with single or double dose of either Zn or B or in combination (Fig. 1). For example high straw yield with very little difference was observed among treatments $T_4$ ($B_1Zn_0$), $T_6$ ($B_1Zn_2$), $T_7$ ($B_2Zn_0$) and $T_8$ ($B_2Zn_1$). The lowest biomass production was recorded in control ($T_{10}$) at all stages of crop growth.

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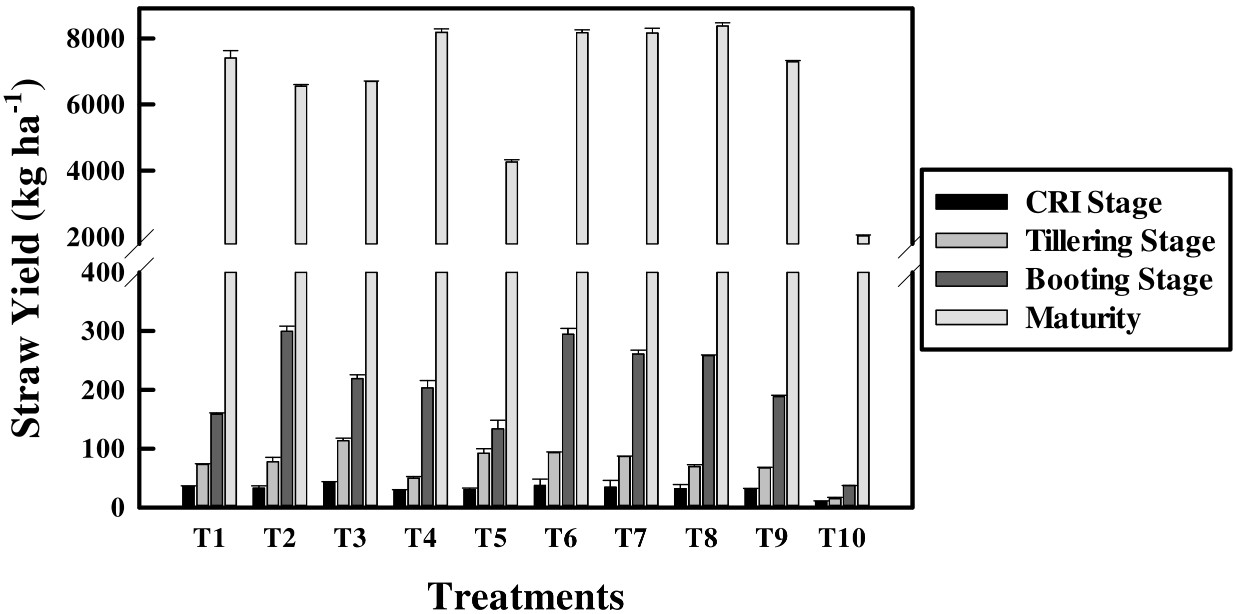


**Fig. 1:** Effect of treatments on average straw yield (kg $ha^{-1}$) over two years at different stages of wheat growth. The standard deviation of measurement is shown as error bars. The CRI stage indicates crown root initiation.

A significant difference in the nutrient uptake was recorded in different treatments and at different growth stages (Fig. 2). The highest uptake (kg $ha^{-1}$) of N over the entire growth period was recorded in treatment $T_6$ ($B_1Zn_2$) and minimum in $T_{10}$ (control). The maximum amount of N uptake at different growth stages was not consistent. For example, $T_2$ ($B_0Zn_1$) was recorded with the highest amount of N uptake during booting stage. While the highest amount of P uptake was recorded in $T_7$ ($B_2Zn_0$), the highest amount of K uptake was recorded in $T_8$ ($B_2Zn_1$). Similar to N uptake, a variable amount of P and K uptake was also recorded at different growth stages in different treatments. The highest amount of B and Zn uptake was recorded in treatment $T_9$ ($B_2Zn_2$). High amount of B and Zn application might show some synergistic effect to provide higher amount of uptake. The treatment $T_{10}$ (control) always recorded with the least amount of nutrient uptake.

**Table 3:** Effect of treatments on the yield components and grain yield (t $ha^{-1}$) of wheat. The data from 2010-11 and 2011-12 are shown along with the mean (average) over two years. S.D. stands for standard deviation.

| Treatments | Tiller Sq. $m^{-1}$ | | | Grains $Spike^{-1}$ | | | 1000 Grain weight | | | Grain Yield (t $ha^{-1}$) | | | Harvest Index (%) | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 2010-11 | 2011-12 | Mean (S.D.) | 2010-11 | 2011-12 | Mean (S.D.) | 2010-11 | 2011-12 | Mean (S.D.) | 2010-11 | 2011-12 | Mean (S.D.) | 2010-11 | 2011-12 | Mean (S.D.) |
| T1 | 171 | 168 | 169.5 (2.12) | 37 | 36 | 36.5 (0.70) | 45.72 | 45.75 | 45.74 (0.02) | 2.89 | 2.77 | 2.83 (0.08) | 27.7 | 27.6 | 27.6 (0.07) |
| T2 | 156 | 156 | 156.0 (0) | 41 | 42 | 41.5 (0.70) | 42.74 | 42.80 | 42.77 (0.04) | 2.73 | 2.80 | 2.77 (0.05) | 29.5 | 29.8 | 29.7 (0.21) |
| T3 | 165 | 162 | 163.5 (2.12) | 39 | 39 | 39.0 (0) | 45.92 | 45.72 | 45.82 (0.14) | 2.95 | 2.89 | 2.92 (0.04) | 30.6 | 30.1 | 30.4 (0.35) |
| T4 | 143 | 145 | 143.8 (1.41) | 43 | 43 | 43.0 (0) | 44.54 | 44.00 | 44.27 (0.38) | 2.73 | 2.74 | 2.74 (0.01) | 25.2 | 24.9 | 25.1 (0.21) |
| T5 | 158 | 150 | 153.8 (5.66) | 42 | 42 | 42.0 (0) | 51.50 | 51.51 | 51.51 (0.01) | 3.41 | 3.25 | 3.33 (0.11) | 44.1 | 43.5 | 43.8 (0.42) |
| T6 | 188 | 185 | 186.3 (2.12) | 48 | 51 | 49.5 (2.12) | 47.64 | 47.34 | 47.49 (0.21) | 4.29 | 4.47 | 4.38 (0.13) | 34.6 | 35.2 | 34.9 (0.42) |
| T7 | 176 | 174 | 174.8 (1.41) | 50 | 53 | 51.5 (2.12) | 43.80 | 43.83 | 43.82 (0.02) | 3.84 | 4.04 | 3.94 (0.14) | 32.3 | 32.8 | 32.6 (0.35) |
| T8 | 134 | 137 | 135.3 (2.12) | 45 | 46 | 45.5 (0.70) | 44.74 | 44.20 | 44.47 (0.38) | 2.69 | 2.79 | 2.74 (0.07) | 24.4 | 24.8 | 24.6 (0.28) |
| T9 | 143 | 142 | 142.3 (0.71) | 52 | 50 | 51.0 (1.41) | 41.38 | 39.38 | 40.38 (1.41) | 3.07 | 2.80 | 2.93 (0.19) | 29.7 | 27.6 | 28.7 (1.48) |
| T10 | 122 | 124 | 122.8 (1.41) | 36 | 39 | 37.5 (2.12) | 37.00 | 36.00 | 36.50 (0.71) | 1.62 | 1.74 | 1.68 (0.08) | 44.1 | 46.4 | 45.2 (1.63) |

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**Table 4:** Effect of treatments on the uptake of nutrients (kg $ha^{-1}$) by seed.The data from 2010-11 and 2011-12 are shown along with the average over two years. S.D. stands for standard deviation.

| Treatments | Nitrogen | | | Phosphorus | | | Potassium | | | Boron | | | Zinc | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 2010-11 | 2011-12 | Mean (S.D.) | 2010-11 | 2011-12 | Mean (S.D.) | 2010-11 | 2011-12 | Mean (S.D.) | 2010-11 | 2011-12 | Mean (S.D.) | 2010-11 | 2011-12 | Mean (S.D.) |
| T1 | 70.47 | 59.66 | 65.06 (7.64) | 1.40 | 1.74 | 1.57 (0.24) | 23.14 | 24.90 | 24.02 (1.24) | 0.280 | 0.255 | 0.267 (0.02) | 0.297 | 0.228 | 0.262 (0.05) |
| T2 | 58.17 | 58.89 | 58.53 (0.51) | 1.58 | 1.50 | 1.54 (0.06) | 19.14 | 22.43 | 20.78 (2.33) | 0.249 | 0.253 | 0.251 (0.01) | 0.314 | 0.168 | 0.241 (0.10) |
| T3 | 64.54 | 59.85 | 62.19 (3.32) | 1.40 | 1.24 | 1.32 (0.11) | 19.21 | 21.66 | 20.44 (1.73) | 0.292 | 0.271 | 0.282 (0.02) | 0.406 | 0.361 | 0.384 (0.03) |
| T4 | 69.54 | 66.06 | 67.80 (2.46) | 2.29 | 1.90 | 2.09 (0.28) | 25.93 | 27.43 | 26.68 (1.06) | 0.211 | 0.239 | 0.225 (0.02) | 0.300 | 0.645 | 0.472 (0.24) |
| T5 | 83.94 | 72.69 | 78.32 (7.95) | 2.25 | 1.88 | 2.07 (0.26) | 18.74 | 21.09 | 19.92 (1.66) | 0.237 | 0.289 | 0.263 (0.04) | 0.554 | 0.292 | 0.423 (0.18) |
| T6 | 121.25 | 116.31 | 118.78 (3.49) | 2.61 | 2.46 | 2.54 (0.08) | 38.59 | 44.67 | 41.63 (4.30) | 0.231 | 0.385 | 0.308 (0.11) | 0.482 | 0.402 | 0.442 (0.06) |
| T7 | 104.39 | 101.86 | 103.12 (1.79) | 2.53 | 2.41 | 2.47(0.11) | 28.83 | 36.38 | 32.60 (5.34) | 0.215 | 0.246 | 0.230 (0.02) | 0.413 | 0.333 | 0.373 (0.06) |
| T8 | 63.97 | 70.97 | 67.47 (4.50) | 1.20 | 1.11 | 1.16 (0.06) | 18.81 | 30.64 | 24.73 (8/36) | 0.190 | 0.232 | 0.211 (0.03) | 0.255 | 0.195 | 0.225 (0.04) |
| T9 | 77.27 | 72.02 | 74.65 (3.71) | 1.77 | 1.47 | 1.62 (0.21) | 18.40 | 26.56 | 22.48 (5.77) | 0.171 | 0.197 | 0.184 (0.02) | 0.284 | 0.175 | 0.229 (0.07) |
| T10 | 13.14 | 9.75 | 11.45 (2.40) | 0.76 | 0.79 | 0.77 (0.02) | 7.28 | 9.58 | 8.43 (1.62) | 0.061 | 0.060 | 0.060 (0.00) | 0.020 | 0.065 | 0.043 (0.03) |

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A significant difference was observed in the uptake of different nutrients by seed (Table 4). The highest uptake of almost all nutrients (N, P, K, and B) was recorded in treatment T6 ($B_1Zn_2$) except for Zn, the highest uptake of which was recorded in treatment $T_4$ ($B_1Zn_0$). The highest production as well as the interaction between the micro-nutrients (B and Zn) in treatment $T_6$ facilitated higher amount of nutrients uptake in seed [42]. The lowest uptake of all nutrients was recorded in treatment $T_{10}$ (control). A similar trend was observed for the uptake of nutrients by straw (Table 5).

**Table 5:** Effect of treatments on the uptake of nutrients (kg $ha^{-1}$) by straw along with the average grain yield and straw yield over two years. S.D. stands for standard deviation and presented in bracket.

| Treatments | Grain yield (S.D.) | Straw yield (S.D.) | Nitrogen (S.D.) | Phosphorus (S.D.) | Potassium (S.D.) | Boron (S.D.) | Zinc (S.D.) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| T1 | 2829.83 (89.10) | 7410.68 (220.6) | 60.26 (7.66) | 0.34(0.01) | 109.61 (2.83) | 0.118 (0.02) | 1.130 (0.01) |
| T2 | 2768.95 (49.49) | 6558.93 (45.6) | 19.26 (6.36) | 0.38(0.00) | 107.67 (2.34) | 0.252 (0.03) | 2.134 (1.60) |
| T3 | 2921.77 (46.67) | 6702.67 (13.2) | 51.61 (1.43) | 0.21(0.03) | 111.44 (12.46) | 0.172 (0.02) | 0.821 (0.21) |
| T4 | 2736.29 (9.89) | 8177.83 (107.7) | 27.29 (28.78) | 0.36(0.05) | 131.95 (14.75) | 0.296 (0.26) | 1.723 (0.71) |
| T5 | 3325.93 (114.55) | 4268.08 (68.7) | 25.67 (2.12) | 0.21(0.00) | 73.80 (1.44) | 0.230 (0.01) | 0.581 (0.06) |
| T6 | 4377.06 (126.57) | 8171.53 (84.7) | 84.69 (7.35) | 0.23(0.01) | 141.31 (3.87) | 0.477 (0.03) | 1.756 (2.11) |
| T7 | 3942.73 (140.71) | 8160.33 (146.6) | 20.36 (22.25) | 0.40(0.07) | 149.46 (13.66) | 0.413 (0.00) | 1.947 (2.34) |
| T8 | 2736.62 (68.59) | 8376.87 (96.9) | 34.00 (1.26) | 0.33(0.00) | 155.96 (8.56) | 0.227 (0.03) | 5.001 (6.15) |
| T9 | 2931.12 (190.92) | 7288.23 (44.6) | 25.52 (4.48) | 0.17(0.00) | 120.57 (5.46) | 0.567 (0.01) | 3.448 (4.61) |
| T10 | 1679.67 (86.97) | 2033.42 (28.2) | 2.28 (0.03) | 0.06(0.04) | 30.75 (0.89) | 0.049 (0.00) | 0.246 (0.31) |

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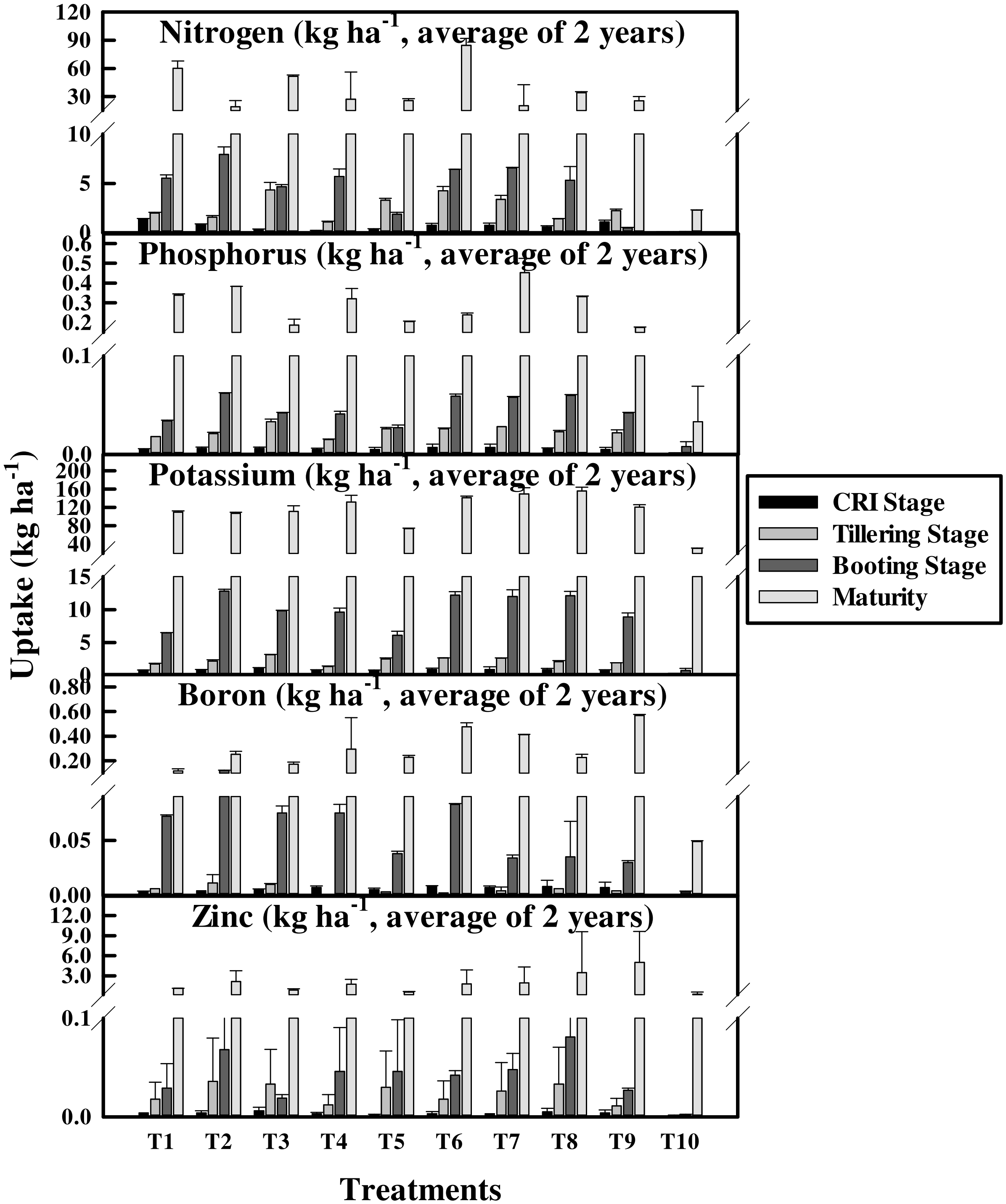


**Fig. 2:** Effect of treatments on the uptake of nutrients (N, P, K, B, and Zn) at different growth stages (CRI, Tillering, Booting and Maturity) of wheat. The standard deviation of measurement is shown as error bars. The CRI stage indicates crown root initiation.

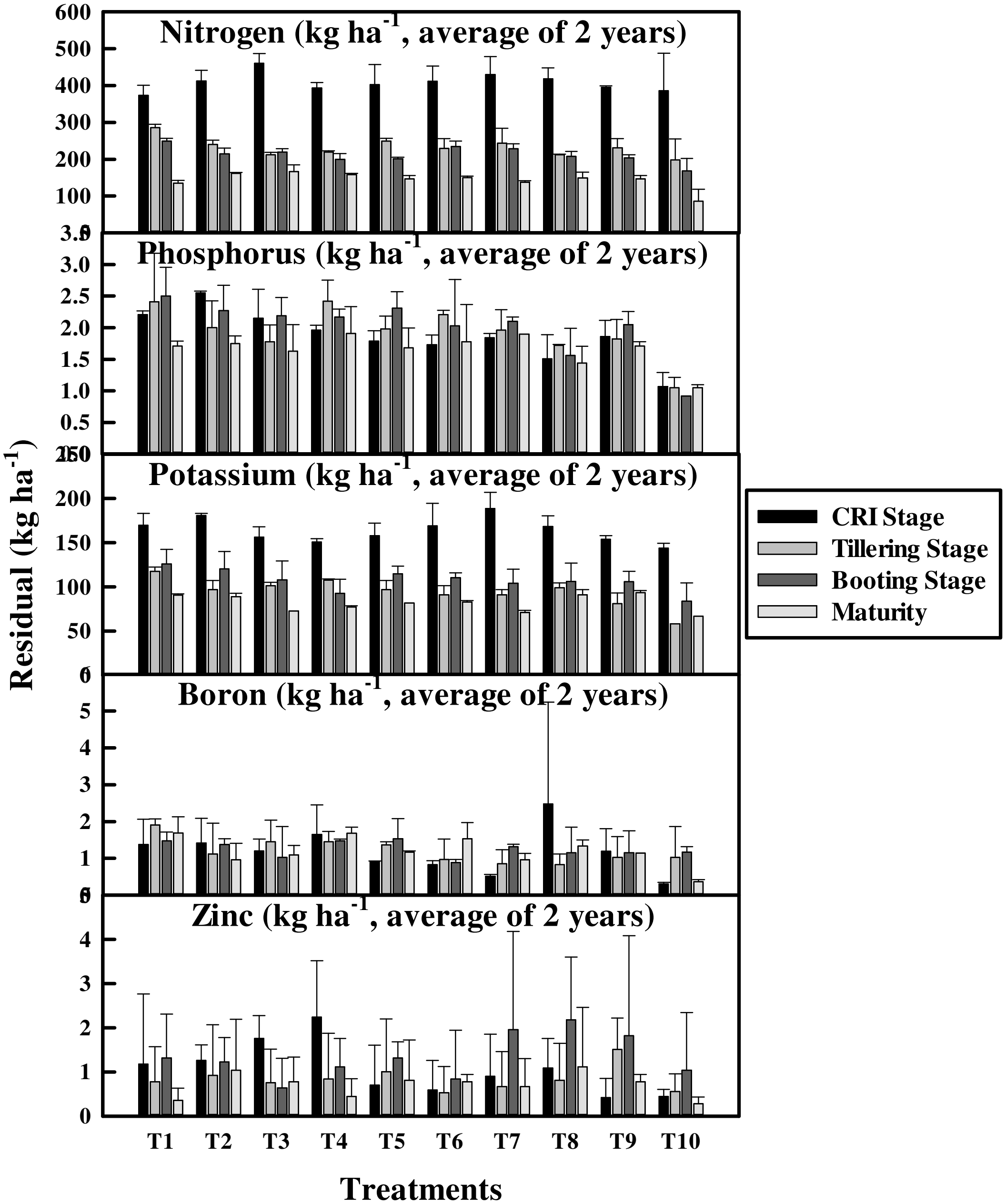


**Fig. 3:** Effect of treatments on the residual nutrient (N, P, K, B, and Zn) status at different growth stages (CRI, Tillering, Booting and Maturity) of wheat. The standard deviation of measurement is shown as error bars. The CRI stage indicates crown root initiation.

The B and Zn concentration in seeds (Table 4) and straw (Table 5) were calculated after dividing the total uptake of nutrients by the total grain and straw production. It clearly showed that with the increasing production, the concentration of nutrients, both B and Zn in seed and straw decreased.

There was significant difference in the residual N status of soil at different treatment plots and at different growth stages. Initial application of N resulted a high amount of residual N at the CRI stage and gradually decreased towards maturity, which had the least amount of residual N (Fig. 3). Minimum demand of the applied N at the beginning of the growth stages resulted in a high amount of residual N at the CRI stage, while the high demand towards maturity left the least amount of residual N. High demand during the peak growth stages such as tillering and booting resulted in a very similar amount of residual N, which was lower than that at CRI stage. The highest amount of residual N was recorded in treatment $T_3$ ($B_0Zn_2$) and the lowest amount was recorded in treatment $T_{10}$ (control). The residual K status in soil at different growth stages of wheat showed a very similar trend as that of N. The CRI stage was recorded with the highest amount of residual K, which in general decreased towards maturity. There was a significant difference between the treatments at different growth stages. Treatment $T_7$ ($B_2Zn_0$) was recorded with the highest of amount of residual K at the CRI stage, while Treatment $T_1$ ($B_0Zn_0$) was recorded with the highest amount of K at other growth stages (Fig. 3). The absence of micronutrients in treatment $T_1$ might have inhibited the uptake resulting in a high amount of residual K.

The residual P in soil showed a little different trend than N and K (Fig. 3). There was no specific trend of residual P at different growth stages. In general, a higher amount of residual P was recorded at the CRI stage compared to tillering and booting stage. This might be due to the presence of unavailable form of P at the beginning of the growth stage. While the difference between the growth stages of wheat was not significant, the difference between the treatments was significant. The highest amount of P was recorded in treatment $T_2$ ($B_0Zn_1$) for the CRI stage while treatment $T_4$ ($B_1Zn_0$) at the maturity. The lowest amount of residual P was recorded in treatment $T_{10}$ (control).

There was a significant difference in the residual B status in soil at different nutrient treatment combinations. However, the difference was not significant at different growth stages. There was no specific trend on the residual amount of B among the growth stages (Fig. 3). For example, while the treatment $T_8$ ($B_2Zn_1$) was recorded with the highest amount of residual B at the CRI stage, treatment $T_1$ ($B_0Zn_0$) was recorded with the highest amount of B at the tillering stage (Fig. 3). A similar trend in the residual Zn content was observed at different growth stages and at different treatments. For example, the highest amount of residual Zn was observed in

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treatment $T_4$ ($B_1Zn_0$) at the CRI stage, while the highest amount of residual Zn was observed in treatment $T_8$ ($B_2Zn_1$) at the booting stage. A growth stage dependent Zn demand and the residual Zn were also reported by Ozturk et al. [43]. The variation in the residual Zn might also be due to the combined effect of pH, EC, organic carbon and P, which ultimately controls the Zn availability [44]. The lowest amount of residual B and Zn was observed in treatment $T_{10}$ (control). In general a lower amount of Zn was recorded at maturity, which indicates a demand of Zn in the production of crop.

**Table 6:** Correlation (*r*) between soil available nutrient status at harvest and the nutrient content in straw averaged over two years

| | Plant N | Plant P | Plant K | Plant B | Plant Zn |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Soil N | 0.41** | 0.59** | 0.66** | 0.39** | 0.33* |
| Soil P | 0.36** | 0.63** | 0.67** | 0.60** | 0.11 |
| Soil K | 0.28* | 0.39** | 0.38** | 0.31* | 0.64** |
| Soil B | 0.68** | 0.57** | 0.63** | 0.26* | 0.25* |
| Soil Zn | 0.10 | 0.50** | 0.48** | 0.35 | 0.64** |

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

**Table 7:** Correlation (*r*) between soil available nutrient status at harvest and the nutrient content in seed averaged over two years

| | Soil N | Soil P | Soil K | Soil B | Soil Zn |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Seed N | 0.54** | 0.76** | 0.23* | 0.56** | 0.37** |
| Seed P | 0.40** | 0.83** | -0.03 | 0.47** | 0.07 |
| Seed K | 0.48** | 0.71** | 0.19 | 0.63** | 0.25* |
| Seed B | 0.80** | 0.74** | 0.32* | 0.69** | 0.41** |
| Seed Zn | 0.70** | 0.80** | -0.06 | 0.64** | 0.15 |

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

A positive correlation was observed between the uptake of different nutrients and the grain and straw yield irrespective of different treatments (Fig. 4).The correlation coefficient (*r*) was as high as 0.97 between K uptake (kg $ha^{-1}$) and the straw yield (t $ha^{-1}$). There was a very weak correlation between the Zn uptake and the grain yield (Fig. 5). The uptake of nutrients was governed by the soil, environmental and management practices. For example, the availability of B was determined by the availability of Zn in soil [28]. Santra et al. [45] also reported an increased amount of DTPA extractable Zn with the application of B. The relationship between B and Zn was found to be synergistic making high amount of Zn available in soil. A high correlation was also observed between the residual nutrient status in soil and the nutrient status is straw (Table 6) or between residual status in soil and the nutrient status is seed (Table 7).

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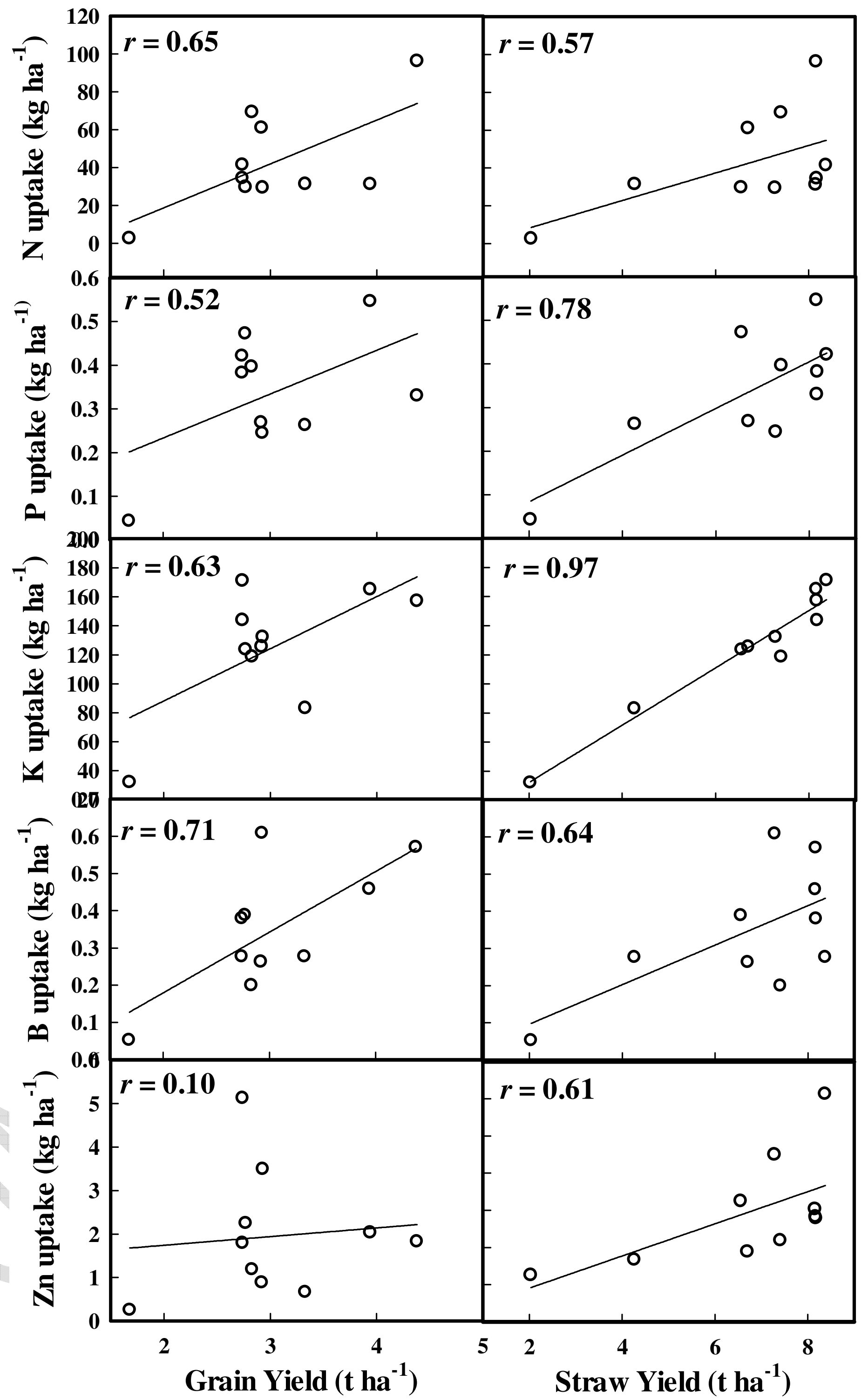


**Fig. 4:** Correlation coefficient ($r$) between the nutrient (N, P, K, B, and Zn) uptake (kg ha$^{-1}$) by plants and the grain and straw yield (t ha$^{-1}$) of wheat.

## Conclusions

This study examined the effect of boron and zinc on the yield and uptake of different nutrients by wheat in the acid soil region of West Bengal, India. The yield components and grain yield of wheat showed a significant difference among the treatment combinations. The maximum average grain yield (4.4 t $ha^{-1}$) over two years was observed in the treatment $T_6$ with higher amount of Zn application along with recommended dose of Boron application. The minimum grain yield was observed in treatment $T_{10}$ (1.7 t $ha^{-1}$). A relatively higher yield was obtained from the treatments with any nutrient combination over that of the control ($T_{10}$). Along with the difference in grain yield, a significant difference in straw yield was also observed among the treatments. The application of boron and zinc might show some synergistic effects leading to high grain and straw yield in the acid soil region. High response from a combined application of B and Zn clearly demonstrated the necessity of micronutrients for improving production in the studied regions with acid soils. The presence of micro-nutrients and their combination also affected the uptake of nutrients in different growth stages of wheat. The interaction effect was also visible in the uptake nutrients by seeds. A positive correlation was observed between the uptake of nutrients and the yield of grain and straw in this study region with acid soils. The residual nutrient status showed a build-up of nutrients in soils. Therefore, an application of a mixture of micronutrients is recommended over a single micronutrient for the acid soil regions of West Bengal in order to get a better response from the applied nutrient sources and thus the production. This result may also be applied for the other grain crops in this region. However, the response of multiple nutrient combinations on the crop growth and production are required to study in future for better understanding the nutrient dynamics in the acid soil regions of West Bengal.

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