

## Exploring Factors Influencing Enrollment in Master's in Population Education at Sanothimi Campus

Milan Acharya  
Sanothimi Campus  
[milanpanga123@gmail.com](mailto:milanpanga123@gmail.com)

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### Abstract

*This study examines the factors affecting student enrollment in the Master's program in Population Education. The objective was to explore the causes of low enrollment and suggest strategies to encourage students to join the program. A qualitative research design with a case study approach was used. The study focused on students who completed a Bachelor's degree in Population Education. Sanothimi Campus, Bhaktapur, was selected purposively as the sample campus as I am a teacher educator for the last eight years in this campus. Ten master's level students, two dropped-out students, the Head of the Health and Population department, and an assistant campus chief were interviewed using purposive sampling. Thematic analysis revealed key factors affecting enrollment, such as mandatory attendance policies, lack of motivation and interest, frequent assessments, and limited social respect for the teaching profession. The study recommends re-structuring the semester system to suit the Nepalese context, incorporating culturally relevant content, and enhancing the status of the teaching profession to increase enrollment. These findings provide valuable insights into addressing the challenges and improving student participation in Population Education at the Master's level.*

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**Keywords:** Population education, student enrollment, Master's in Population Education

### Introduction

In Nepal, the specialization in population starts after completing the +2 level. Students enrolled in population with the aim to be engaged in the social field. Generally, those students who could not get opportunity and capacity to study the technical subject enrolled in Bachelor in population education. The students who completed Bachelor in population education with 200 marks of population education can uplift to the master's level with the specialization in population education. In the Kathmandu Valley, Sanothimi Campus is the foremost choice for the students to continue their higher studies in population education. Sanothimi Campus is located at heart of Madhyapur Thimi Municipality. This campus was established as the name of National Vocational Training Center (NVTC) with the aim of producing vocational technicians and teachers in 2024 B.S. Later on, 2029, this campus was affiliated to Tribhuvan University in the name of Sanothimi Campus after the implementation of National Education System Plan (NESP 2008). It began to produce trained teachers

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for vocational education according to the newly introduced curriculum (2028) in the school level. Now, Sanothimi Campus has been offering various subjects and courses for specialization including population education in master's level. The campus administration and professors became blissful to implement the population education in semester system as they believed that the number of students will increase onwards.

Semester system provides opportunity for students to polish themselves with great extent through the presentations, midterm examinations, group discussions and submission of assignments, etc. with regular interval of time (Martinez et al., 2021). The master's program, making in the morning shift is to attract the students' of middle and low class family. Almost all of the students need to get job in order to pay their bills, books, rent, and to survive. However, the class in the morning could condense the load and complete their degree even doing the job. Archbell and Coplan, (2022) identified many causes of the students' enrolment and among them dominant causes are the increase of private colleges of education, loss of interest by the students, lack of population equipment, poor governance, lack of quality teachers and many more. The study suggested that the government should motivate students to learn and study population by given them scholarship and support. Also, lecturers of population education should enjoy research grants like their counterparts in the universities to develop their research ability in population education.

The data from Sanothimi Campus indicates a low enrollment of students in the Master's level population education program. This trend has raised significant questions about the underlying reasons behind the declining interest in the subject. Why have we reached such a situation where population education, a discipline of immense relevance in understanding demographic dynamics and social issues, struggles to attract students? There might be several variables associated with this declining enrollment. Some of the potential factors include the lack of awareness among students about the importance and scope of population education, limited career opportunities perceived to be linked with this subject, or even the unavailability of adequate resources and institutional support. Additionally, it is possible that students do not perceive this subject as obligatory or essential in their academic journey or future career aspirations. On the other hand, there might be issues related to accessibility, where some students who might be interested in this field do not get the opportunity to enroll due to financial, geographic, or institutional barriers. Considering these critical concerns, the researcher has selected this topic for her Master's degree thesis. The primary objective of her study is to explore the factors influencing the enrollment of students in population education at the Master's level. Through this research, the study aims to uncover the challenges, barriers, and perceptions that shape students' decisions to pursue or avoid this field of study, providing valuable insights to promote and improve the appeal and accessibility of population education.

## **Method**

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This study followed a qualitative research design with a case study approach. Qualitative research emphasizes understanding participant's perspectives and interpreting their experiences within their environments (Monaro, 2022). The case study approach enabled an in-depth exploration of the complex factors influencing student enrollment in their real-life contexts (Braun & Clarke, 2021). The population of the study consisted of students who had completed a Bachelor's degree in Health and Population Education. Sanothimi Campus, Bhaktapur, was purposively selected as the sample campus. The participants included 10 Master's degree students, three dropped-out students, the Head of the Health and Population Education and an Assistant Campus Chief. A purposive sampling procedure was employed.

Primary data were collected through face to face conversation, conversations in tea shops and under the shed of trees in the campus premises. Semi-structured interviews and observations were also done during the collection of data. Secondary data were gathered from books, journals, articles, and online sources relevant to the study. The semi-structured interview and observation guidelines were developed and validated tools by the university professor. All interviews were recorded with the respondents' consent. The researcher observed aspects like attendance records, classroom activities, physical infrastructure, population education laboratory, rules and regulations, and administrators' service delivery. Observations were conducted three times within a week using an observation checklist.

The collected data were analyzed thematically. First, data were categorized according to respondents and coded. The analysis focused on individual, social, institutional, and content-related factors. Themes were generated by coding interview transcripts, grouping verbatim, and categorizing codes. These themes were interpreted using relevant theories and findings to ensure validity and authenticity. The recorded interviews were transcribed, repeatedly reviewed, and coded. The codes were organized into categories, and themes were generated.

## **Results**

The study revealed that enrollment in the Master's program in Population Education at Sanothimi Campus is influenced by a combination of personal interest, career aspirations, and the perceived relevance of the subject in addressing societal issues. Key factors such as program accessibility, affordability, and the reputation of Sanothimi Campus also played a significant role in attracting students to the program. It is found that individual factors are the obstacles faced by each student due to his/her interest, perception, and experience towards population education. Concerning students' achievements in population education, the head of the department opined up as; the academic achievement of the student at the bachelor level is average. Most of the students secure marks between fifty to sixty percent. Rare students cross the boundary of the first division. The main cause behind it is that most of the students choose other subjects than population education after the completion of their school education. The students who can't get enrolled in other

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streams come to the education faculty. However, the achievement of population education in master's level is satisfactory.

It is also found that most of the good (with good achievement score) students do not choose health and population subject and only the average students choose to join education faculty. On the other hand, health and population is not easy subject in comparison to other subjects. So, the students cannot secure good marks. As a result, they get demotivated to continue their study in health and population education at higher level which causes the reduction of the students at the university level. From the view of regular students, it is found that there were lots of obstacles of studying this subject. Students said, 'most of the subject teachers take regular classes while others do not'. It causes distress in our mind and share with friends that why to study this subject. Most of the students could not do their regular assignment, assignment work and attend in assessment due to their job. As a result, their achievements fall off. The low achievement demotivate others to attract to enroll as well as to get job in the market. It shows that population education subject is in shade.

The findings of the study highlight several factors contributing to the low enrollment of students in the Master's program in Population Education at Sanothimi Campus. A recurring theme among regular and dropout students is a sense of emotional tension and anxiety surrounding the subject. When asked, "Are you anxious about population education?" most regular students expressed significant apprehension. Student 'D' remarked, "The nature of the content taught at the master's level is abstract. Most chapters require memorization. Lack of practical relevance and the difficulty of the curriculum lead to negative perceptions about population education. Additionally, career insecurity after completing the degree further exacerbates these anxieties. The semester system's structure has also emerged as a major source of stress for students. Regular attendance, daily assignments, and internal assessments contribute to students' anxiety, particularly for those balancing jobs and studies. Many students feel burdened by the requirements, which makes them consider withdrawing from the program. Dropout student 'Q' stated, "I felt that I was studying population education only for memorization and to pass exams. Nobody showed me the bright side of population education at Sanothimi Campus. I couldn't manage the regular assignments and practical work due to my job." This sense of being overwhelmed by academic demands without a clear vision of the benefits or career opportunities associated with the program has resulted in many students opting out of the program. Another important finding is the lack of student interest and intrinsic motivation to pursue population education. Student 'C' mentioned, "No doubt, population education is an interesting subject. I enjoy teachers activities and remember it for a long time. However, theory-based chapters are difficult and less engaging." Furthermore, students' interests are often influenced by external factors such as family expectations. While some students, like 'D,' received strong support from their families, others, like 'E,' felt compelled by parents to enroll in the program for potential career opportunities. A lack of personal interest and enjoyment in the subject was evident among a significant proportion of students.

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The absence of motivation and career counseling programs at Sanothimi Campus has also contributed to low enrollment rates. Regular students 'C,' 'E,' and 'A' collectively expressed dissatisfaction with the lack of academic, social, and economic motivation programs. They noted the absence of interaction sessions with successful professionals in the field of population education. Dropout student 'Q' added, "We have not seen a bright future in population education. There is no guarantee of getting a job after completing the degree. Our society values economic status and high-paying jobs more than academic qualifications in population education." The lack of motivation and career prospects has led to frustration among students, ultimately causing many to abandon their studies.

Institutional factors also play a crucial role in students' decision to avoid or drop out of the program. Issues related to classroom management, teacher-student interaction, campus infrastructure, publicity, fee structures, and the semester system have been identified as significant barriers. While some students appreciated the use of ICT tools in classrooms, others criticized certain teachers for relying on outdated methods like copying and reading from the internet. Dropout student 'T' observed, "The surroundings of the campus are full of nature, which gives positive energy to study. But the political issues among student leaders disrupt the learning environment." These factors diminish the appeal of population education as a viable academic option. Additionally, the semester system's rigid policies, such as mandatory attendance and regular assessments, disproportionately affect working students. Dropout student 'M' commented, "I couldn't keep up with the attendance requirements because of my job. The system should be restructured to address the needs of Nepalese students." The lack of flexibility in the semester system is a significant hindrance for many students who wish to balance their studies with personal or professional responsibilities. The study also highlighted the lack of culturally relevant content in the curriculum as a barrier to enrollment. The department head acknowledged, "Population education and culture are strongly related. If we connect population education with students' daily lives, they will feel it is their own subject and think constructively." Students from diverse ethnic backgrounds, such as the Magar community, reported difficulties in understanding lectures due to language barriers and a lack of cultural inclusivity. This disconnect between the curriculum and students' lived experiences has further contributed to the declining interest in the subject.

Overall, it is found that the fluctuating trend of population education in Sanothimi Campus in terms of students enrollment. Furthermore, it also identified the variables associated with the enrolment of population education students and ways to attract the students to enroll in population education. Strict rules and regulations of the semester system, lack of motivation and respect to the teaching field and abstract nature of the content are the prevailing factors associated with the enrolment of students. Also, restructuring the semester system, giving respect and more attention to the teaching field and the sound academic environment of the colleges together can increase the enrolment rate. The students, teachers and other concerned bodies have

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positive mindset towards the population education and they argue that semester system is the need of present time. Thus, with the combining efforts and the timely improvement in the semester system assure the high enrolment of the population education students in master's level.

### **Discussion**

The study revealed several factors influencing the enrollment in the Master's program in Population Education at Sanothimi Campus. These factors can be broadly categorized into personal, institutional, and curriculum-related challenges, all of which contribute to the fluctuating enrollment trends. Understanding these challenges is critical to addressing the underlying issues and promoting the program effectively. Personal interest and career aspirations significantly shape students' decisions to enroll in population education. Many students perceive the subject as relevant to societal issues, but their motivations are often hindered by individual challenges. For instance, students' perceptions and experiences toward population education vary widely. While some view it as a subject of potential value, others lack genuine interest or enthusiasm. Student 'C' mentioned that theory-based chapters are less engaging and difficult to grasp, making the subject seem abstract and challenging. This aligns with findings from similar studies, which suggest that student interest is a crucial factor in academic success.

Furthermore, students often experience emotional tension and anxiety regarding population education. The abstract nature of the curriculum and the lack of practical applications make it challenging for students to relate to the subject. Student 'D' noted that most chapters require memorization, which diminishes their motivation to continue the program. These sentiments echo the findings of Johnson and Gallagher, (2021), who emphasized the importance of practical relevance in higher education curricula. The academic performance of students in population education at Sanothimi Campus reflects broader challenges. According to the department head, most students secure average marks at the bachelor's level, with only a few achieving first-division results. This low performance can be attributed to the fact that many students initially prefer other streams and choose population education as a fallback option. Additionally, the demanding nature of the subject, as highlighted by regular students, often discourages them from excelling academically. Similar patterns have been observed in other disciplines where students perceive limited career opportunities (Futami et al., 2022).

Career insecurity further exacerbates students' apprehension. Dropout student 'Q' remarked, "There is no guarantee of getting a job after completing the degree." This lack of assurance creates a negative perception of population education, leading to lower enrollment rates. The absence of career counseling and motivational programs at Sanothimi Campus has also been identified as a critical gap. Students like 'E' and 'A' expressed dissatisfaction with the lack of interaction with successful professionals, which could have inspired them to see the potential of the field.

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Institutional factors play a significant role in shaping students' experiences and decisions to enroll or continue in the program. Classroom management, teacher-student interaction, and campus infrastructure are crucial determinants of student satisfaction (Batouei & Teoh, 2021; Gautam & Acharya, 2023; Momen et al., 2023; ). While some students appreciated the use of ICT tools, others criticized outdated teaching methods. Dropout student 'T' observed, "Some teachers copy content from the internet and read it out in class, which is not engaging." This lack of innovation in teaching approaches diminishes the overall appeal of the program.

The semester system, although modern and structured, has been identified as a source of stress for many students. Regular attendance, daily assignments, and internal assessments disproportionately affect working students. Student 'M' commented, "I couldn't keep up with attendance requirements because of my job." This highlights the need for more flexible academic policies that accommodate the diverse needs of Nepalese students. Another critical issue is the lack of cultural relevance in the curriculum. Population education, being closely tied to societal and cultural contexts, must reflect the diverse backgrounds of its students (Acharya et al., 2023). The department head acknowledged, "If we connect population education with students' daily lives, they will feel it is their own subject." However, students from ethnic minorities, such as the Magar community, reported difficulties in understanding lectures due to language barriers and a lack of cultural inclusivity (Koirala et al., 2021; Neupane & Giri, 2021; Nishant & Kumar, 2022 ). This disconnect further contributes to declining interest in the subject.

The study also highlighted various challenges faced by students during their academic journey. Regular students reported that inconsistent teaching practices caused distress and frustration. While some teachers took regular classes, others did not, leading to a lack of continuity in learning. Students also struggled to balance their studies with job responsibilities, which impacted their ability to complete assignments and attend assessments (Acharya, 2019; Jones et al., 2021; Tulaskar & Turunen, 2022). These challenges resulted in low academic achievements, demotivating both current and prospective students. The rigid structure of the semester system was another significant challenge. Dropout student 'Q' noted, "I felt that I was studying population education only for memorization and to pass exams." This sentiment underscores the need for a more student-centered approach that emphasizes practical applications and real-world relevance.

The study highlights the multifaceted challenges affecting enrollment in the Master's program in Population Education at Sanothimi Campus. Personal, institutional, and curriculum-related factors contribute to the fluctuating trends in student enrollment. Addressing these challenges requires a holistic approach that combines curriculum reform, institutional support, and career counseling. By creating a more engaging, inclusive, and flexible academic environment, Sanothimi Campus can attract and retain more students in the program. These efforts will not only enhance the academic achievements of students but also promote the societal

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 relevance of population education in addressing critical issues. With collaborative efforts from all stakeholders, the program can achieve its full potential and secure its place as a vital academic discipline.

### **Conclusion and Recommendation**

The low enrollment in the Master's program in Population Education at Sanothimi Campus is primarily due to factors such as subject's abstract nature, career insecurity, lack of motivation and counseling, rigid semester system policies, and a decontextualized curriculum. Addressing these issues requires significant institutional reforms. Recommendations include restructuring the semester system to be more flexible, incorporating culturally relevant content, providing scholarships and career counseling, and conducting motivational programs to showcase the value and opportunities in population education. Creating an engaging and supportive academic environment can help reverse the declining enrollment trend and ensure the sustainability of the program.

To address these challenges, several strategies can be implemented to improve enrollment and retention in the Master's program in Population Education. First, the curriculum should be revised to include more practical and culturally relevant content. Connecting the subject to students' daily lives and societal issues can make it more engaging and relatable. The incorporation of hands-on projects and fieldwork can also enhance students' understanding and appreciation of the subject. Second, career counseling and motivational programs should be introduced at Sanothimi Campus. Interaction sessions with successful professionals in the field can inspire students and provide them with a clearer vision of career opportunities. Additionally, highlighting the societal importance of population education can help shift perceptions and attract more students. Third, institutional reforms are necessary to create a supportive academic environment. Flexible policies, such as accommodating working students and reducing the rigidity of the semester system, can help address the diverse needs of the student body. Teachers should also adopt innovative and interactive teaching methods to enhance student engagement.

Finally, efforts should be made to promote population education as a viable and respected academic field. Public awareness campaigns and collaboration with policymakers can help raise the profile of the subject and attract more students. The department should also focus on creating a positive and inclusive learning environment that respects cultural diversity and fosters academic excellence.

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