

Trends and Challenges in Student Enrolment, Retention, and Graduation; Case Study of Gaurishankar Multiple Campus

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ABSTRACT	ARTICLE DETAILS
This study examines the trends and challenges in student enrolment, retention, and graduation at Gaurishankar Multiple Campus (GMC), Dolakha, by analysing institutional data from the academic years 2077/78 to 2081/82. The findings reveal significant volatility in undergraduate enrolment, with programs like BBS and BA experiencing a notable decline, while B.Ed maintained relative stability. Retention emerged as a critical challenge, evidenced by a rising dropout rate at the bachelor's level, which increased from 1.27% to 4.88% over the five-year period. Although the total number of graduates improved to 118 by 2081/82, graduation outcomes remained inconsistent, with bachelor's pass percentages fluctuating between 31.67% and 45.66%, indicating systemic issues in teaching-learning quality and student support. The study identifies key challenges, including geographic isolation, competition from urban institutions, inadequate academic resources, and socioeconomic barriers faced by students. While recent Quality Assurance and Accreditation (QAA) initiatives offer a foundation for improvement, the research concludes that persistent structural issues threaten institutional sustainability. It underscores the urgent need for targeted interventions in academic support, curriculum relevance, and strategic enrolment management to enhance student success and institutional viability. KEYWORDS: Academic performance; Gaurishankar Multiple Campus; Graduation trends; Higher education challenges; Institutional sustainability; Retention rate, Student enrolment;	Published On: 28 October 2025 Available on: https://ijmir.com

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

The expansion of higher education institutions (HEIs) in Nepal has significantly increased access to tertiary education, yet persistent challenges related to student enrollment, retention, and graduation continue to be pressing concerns (Adhikari, 2022). Gaurishankar Multiple Campus (GMC), founded in 1982 and affiliated with Tribhuvan University, stands as one of the pioneering community campuses in Dolakha district. It serves as an important educational hub for rural and semi-urban populations, aligning with the government's broader policy objectives aimed at promoting equitable access to higher education (University Grants Commission [UGC], 2023). The recently published Quality Assurance and Accreditation (QAA) report provides a comprehensive overview of GMC's performance over the past five years, highlighting patterns in student participation, academic outcomes, and institutional challenges. Enrollment trends at GMC reveal fluctuations across both undergraduate and graduate programs. Peak enrollment was recorded at 794 students in 2078/79 but declined to 636 by 2081/82, with female students comprising a significant portion of the student body. These trends mirror national observations, which suggest that while female participation in higher education in Nepal has improved, maintaining consistent enrollment especially in rural areas remains challenging (Khanal & Shrestha, 2021). International research further indicates that rural institutions often experience declining enrollments due to factors such as migration, competition with urban universities, and evolving labor market demands (OECD, 2021).

Student retention also poses a critical concern. GMC's bachelor's programs experienced an increase in dropout rates from 1.27% in 2077/78 to 4.88% in 2081/82, whereas master's programs reported minimal attrition. These figures suggest that undergraduate students are particularly vulnerable to discontinuation, often due to financial constraints, insufficient academic preparation, and limited career counseling support. Research from the South Asian context reinforces the notion that attrition is closely linked to

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socioeconomic challenges and gaps in institutional support (Pokharel & Bista, 2022). To mitigate these challenges, GMC has introduced scholarships, remedial classes, and counseling services, though gaps remain in addressing the needs of first-generation learners and economically disadvantaged students.

Graduation outcomes provide further insight into academic success. In 2081/82, GMC conferred degrees to 118 students, with female graduates representing a majority in several programs. Nonetheless, overall pass rates at the bachelor's level fluctuated between 31.67% and 45.66% over five years, indicating uneven academic performance. Studies on Nepalese higher education emphasize that teaching quality, learning resources, and assessment methods critically influence timely graduation (Poudel, 2020). International research also suggests that integrating ICT-based pedagogy and continuous assessment can enhance academic achievement and completion rates (UNESCO, 2022). GMC's move toward ICT-enabled classrooms and blended learning approaches aligns with such global best practices. Additionally, effective governance and quality assurance mechanisms are crucial in shaping student outcomes. The campus's recent accreditation under the UGC's QAA framework in 2025 has introduced structured internal processes, including regular feedback, remedial measures, and digitalized Educational Management Information Systems (EMIS).

While accreditation improves institutional accountability and public trust, it cannot fully resolve structural issues such as limited research culture, underdeveloped faculty skills, and weak industry linkages (Sharma & Gautam, 2021; Luitel, 2023). Equity and inclusiveness remain central considerations; GMC has maintained steady enrollment of students from educationally disadvantaged and marginalized communities, averaging around 240 annually. This aligns with Nepal's national GESI policy, which underscores inclusivity as a cornerstone of higher education development (UGC, 2023), and international studies confirm that equity-focused policies improve retention and social impact (World Bank, 2021).

Despite notable progress, GMC faces ongoing challenges, including limited laboratory facilities, difficulty recruiting qualified faculty for advanced programs, and geographic isolation that limits partnerships and internships. Addressing these issues requires innovative strategies such as expanding academic linkages, enhancing digital infrastructure, and promoting community-based research. Recent scholarship stresses that rural HEIs must leverage community engagement and contextualized curricula to remain sustainable and relevant (Acharya, 2024). In sum, the experience of GMC reflects broader national and global challenges in sustaining student enrollment, retention, and graduation. While initiatives such as QAA accreditation, ICT integration, and improved student support have made a positive impact, structural and contextual barriers continue to influence academic outcomes. Continuous quality improvement, inclusive policies, and alignment with labor market needs remain essential for the campus's future development, contributing to the strengthening of Nepal's higher education system.

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEMS

Ensuring equitable student enrollment, retention, and graduation remains a critical concern for higher education institutions (HEIs) in Nepal. Since its establishment in 1982, Gaurishankar Multiple Campus (GMC), a community-based campus affiliated with Tribhuvan University, has played a key role in broadening access to higher education in Dolakha district. Despite its recent accreditation under the Quality Assurance and Accreditation (QAA) framework in 2025, GMC continues to face ongoing challenges in sustaining enrollment, reducing dropout rates, and enhancing graduation outcomes. Enrollment patterns at GMC have been inconsistent, with total students rising from 651 in 2077/78 to 794 in 2078/79, followed by a decline to 636 in 2081/82. Although female participation remains significant, the overall decrease highlights vulnerabilities in maintaining stable enrollment, a pattern reflected nationally in rural campuses that struggle due to geographic isolation, limited program diversity, and competition from urban institutions (Pokharel & Bista, 2022).

Student retention also poses a major concern. Bachelor's level dropout rates increased from 1.27% in 2077/78 to 4.88% in 2081/82, with female students comprising a notable proportion, whereas master's programs reported minimal attrition. Rising undergraduate dropout is linked to financial pressures, insufficient academic preparation, and limited institutional support, consistent with broader Nepali research indicating that socioeconomic barriers, lack of remedial services, and weak counseling contribute to attrition (Adhikari, 2022). Graduation outcomes similarly show variability; GMC recorded 118 graduates in 2081/82, yet pass rates fluctuated between 31.67% and 45.66% over five years. These inconsistencies reflect challenges in teaching quality, resource availability, and assessment methods, with prior studies noting that absence of innovative pedagogy and continuous evaluation delays graduation (Luitel, 2023).

1.3 RESEARCH GAP

The patterns of student enrollment, retention, and graduation in Nepalese higher education have increasingly attracted scholarly attention. Previous research has examined factors affecting student participation, the influence of equity and access policies, and challenges faced by community campuses (Pokharel & Bista, 2022; Adhikari, 2022). Despite this growing literature, there remains

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a limited understanding of localized trends and campus-specific barriers, particularly in rural and semi-urban settings such as Dolakha. Much of the existing research relies on national or regional generalizations, neglecting variations unique to individual institutions. For instance, while rural campuses are known to experience declining enrollments, there is little systematic study on how internal factors such as faculty composition, infrastructure, and program diversity shape these patterns (Luitel, 2023). GMC's QAA progress report shows fluctuating enrollment, peaking at 794 students in 2078/79 and decreasing to 636 by 2081/82, yet the underlying causes of these fluctuations at the campus level remain underexplored.

Similarly, dropout and retention analyses have mostly focused on macro-level indicators, leaving micro-level institutional dynamics less understood. GMC reports rising bachelor-level dropout rates from 1.27% in 2077/78 to 4.88% in 2081/82, while master's programs show minimal attrition. This suggests program-specific challenges related to academic preparedness, financial pressures, and psychosocial support, which warrant closer examination (Adhikari, 2022). Graduation outcomes also indicate variability; bachelors pass percentages ranged from 31.67% to 45.66%, raising concerns about teaching quality and learning practices. Few studies have investigated how interventions such as ICT integration, remedial classes, and counseling services affect graduation outcomes. Although QAA accreditation is an important benchmark for institutional quality, research evaluating its impact on enrollment stability, retention, and graduation is scarce. GMC's accreditation in 2025 provides an opportunity to assess whether reforms like improved ICT infrastructure, governance, and equity-focused initiatives translate into measurable improvements in student success. This study thus aims to provide a campus-specific analysis to inform policy and practice in Nepalese community campuses.

1.4 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The main objectives of the study are mentioned as below;

- i. To analyze the trends of student enrollment, retention, and graduation over the past five academic years.
- ii. To identify the key challenges influencing enrollment stability, student retention, and graduation outcomes.
- iii. To examine the implications of institutional reforms, including QAA-driven initiatives, on improving student enrollment, retention, and graduation rates.
- iv.

1.5 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research questions based on the objectives above mentioned are mentioned as below;

- i. What has been the overall trend of student enrollment at Gaurishankar Multiple Campus over the last five academic years?
- ii. How has enrollment varied across different programs (BBS, B.Ed, BA, M.Ed, and MBS) during this period?
- iii. What proportion of enrolled students belongs to female and educationally disadvantaged (EDJ) groups?
- iv. What institutional or external factors have contributed to fluctuations in student enrollment?
- v. What has been the trend in graduation rates across different academic programs at GMC?
How do pass percentages compare between bachelor's and master's programs?
To what extent have QAA-driven reforms (such as ICT integration, remedial classes, and counselling services) influenced student retention and graduation outcomes?

1.6 RESEARCH METHODS

Research Design

This study employed a descriptive and analytical case study design focusing on Gaurishankar Multiple Campus (GMC). The case study approach was chosen because it allows for in-depth exploration of institutional patterns and challenges within their real-life context (Yin, 2018). Since the objective was to analyse the trends and challenges of student enrolment, retention, and graduation, the descriptive case study enabled systematic examination of institutional data while also interpreting it against theoretical and empirical insights. This design is particularly appropriate for higher education research in Nepal, where context-specific institutional challenges often diverge from national-level trends (Adhikari, 2022).

Data Source

The primary source of data for this research was the Annual Progress Report submitted under the Quality Assurance and Accreditation (QAA) framework for 2082. This report provided five years of quantitative data on enrollment, dropout, retention, and graduation across bachelor's and master's programs. In addition, information on institutional reforms, student support mechanisms, and governance processes was also used to contextualize the findings. Secondary sources included peer-reviewed journal articles, UGC reports, and international studies on higher education management.

Methods of Analysis

The study employed a mixed-method approach, using descriptive statistics such as frequency, percentage, and trend analysis to examine enrollment, retention, and graduation patterns over a five-year period. Qualitative insights were drawn from content analysis of GMC's institutional strategies as documented in the QAA report, providing both numerical clarity and contextual understanding (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Retention and dropout dynamics were analyzed using Tinto's Student Integration Model (1993), which emphasizes that student persistence depends on academic integration (learning environment, performance) and social integration (peer interaction, counseling, financial support). This framework, widely applied in higher education research, is particularly relevant in South Asian contexts where institutional and community support strongly influence student success (Krause & Armitage, 2020). Using this lens, GMC's remedial classes, counseling, and scholarship programs were evaluated in terms of their impact on retention. For enrollment and graduation patterns, Human Capital Theory (Becker, 1993) was applied, highlighting education as an investment to enhance skills and future earnings, while examining how socio-economic constraints and institutional capacity shape student decisions in rural Nepal.

Justification of Methodology

The choice of descriptive case study and theory-driven analysis is justified for three reasons:

Contextual Relevance: Rural community campuses like GMC face unique challenges not fully captured in national statistics. A case study approach helps highlight these localized realities (Acharya, 2024).

Policy Significance: Since GMC recently obtained QAA accreditation, evaluating institutional progress using official data provides evidence for policymakers and the UGC to strengthen higher education reforms (Luitel, 2023).

Theoretical Rigor: Applying Tinto's integration model and Human Capital Theory ensures that findings are not merely descriptive but also analytically grounded, linking institutional practices to broader theories of student persistence and educational value (Altbach & de Wit, 2020).

Ethical Consideration

The research relied exclusively on publicly available institutional reports and secondary literature. No personal or sensitive student data was used, ensuring ethical compliance. The interpretation of QAA data was conducted objectively, avoiding misrepresentation of institutional achievements or shortcomings.

1.7 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of Gaurishankar Multiple Campus (GMC) highlights key trends in enrollment, retention, and graduation over the past five academic years. Enrollment reached a high of 794 students in 2078/79 but decreased to 636 by 2081/82, with female students consistently comprising around 60% of the total. This pattern mirrors national trends, as rural campuses often struggle to maintain enrollment due to urban migration, limited program options, and evolving labor market demands (Pokharel & Bista, 2022). Retention shows mixed results; bachelor's programs experienced rising dropout rates from 1.27% in 2077/78 to 4.88% in 2081/82, whereas master's programs reported minimal attrition, reflecting the greater vulnerability of undergraduates to financial, academic, and socio-cultural challenges (Adhikari, 2022).

Graduation outcomes are similarly uneven, with totals reaching 118 in 2081/82, but bachelor's pass rates fluctuating between 31.67% and 45.66%. These findings suggest concerns regarding teaching quality, assessment practices, and institutional support. Luitel (2023) notes that accreditation and ICT integration can enhance graduation outcomes, yet GMC still requires improved faculty specialization, curriculum modernization, and stronger industry linkages to ensure consistent student success.

1.7.1 Enrollment of the students for five years

The enrolments trend at Gaurishankar Multiple Campus (GMC) over the last five academic years demonstrates both growth and subsequent decline. Total student enrolments rose from 651 in 2077/78 to a peak of 794 in 2078/79, before gradually decreasing to 664 in 2079/80, 638 in 2080/81, and 636 in 2081/82. At the program level, the Bachelor of Business Studies (BBS) showed fluctuations, declining from 239 students in 2078/79 to 165 in 2081/82. The Bachelor of Education (B.Ed) maintained relative stability, enrolling between 187 and 235 students annually. In contrast, the Bachelor of Arts (BA) recorded a sharper decline, from 174 in 2078/79 to 107 in 2081/82. Master's programs reflected moderate but inconsistent enrolment, with M.Ed ranging from 83 to 99 students and MBS reaching a peak of 86 before falling to 53. These patterns indicate challenges in sustaining enrolments, particularly at the undergraduate level as shown in the following figure.

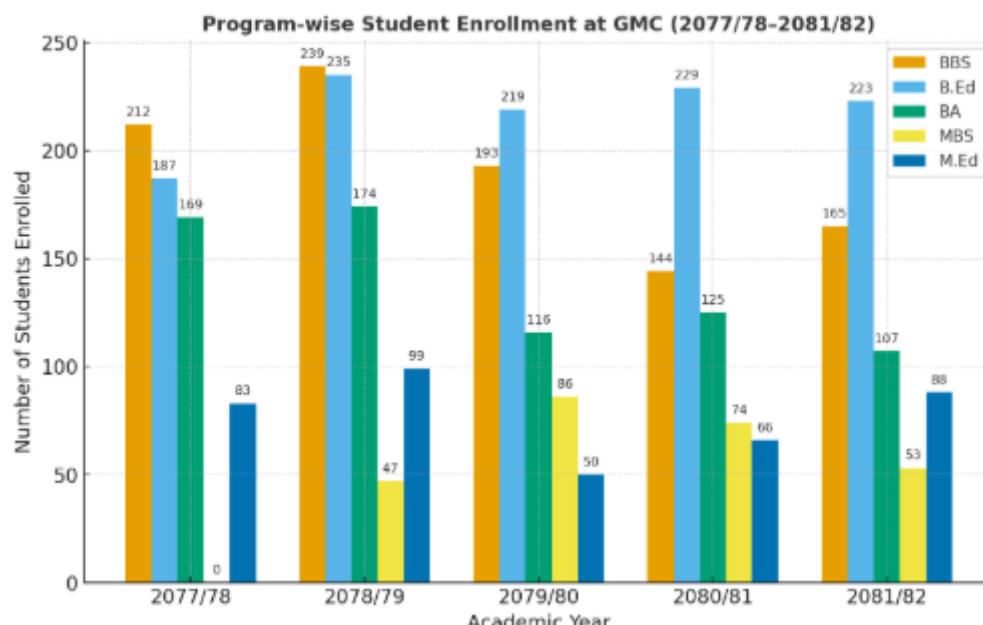


Fig 1. Data Tabulation Number of Students Enrolled for Five Years.

Based on the above mentioned figure the program-wise enrollment trends at Gaurishankar Multiple Campus (GMC) over five academic years (2077/78–2081/82) reveal both consistency and decline across different streams. Among bachelor’s programs, the Bachelor of Business Studies (BBS) initially enrolled 212 students in 2077/78, peaked at 239 in 2078/79, but subsequently fell to 165 by 2081/82. Similarly, the Bachelor of Arts (BA) showed a sharp decline, decreasing from 169 students in 2077/78 and 174 in 2078/79 to just 107 in 2081/82, reflecting a declining interest in humanities programs. In contrast, the Bachelor of Education (B.Ed) demonstrated relative stability and resilience. Enrollment rose from 187 in 2077/78 to 235 in 2078/79, with only minor fluctuations in later years, settling at 223 in 2081/82. This suggests the sustained demand for teaching-related programs in the region.

At the master’s level, the Master of Education (M.Ed) enrolled 83 students in 2077/78, peaked at 99 in 2078/79, but declined sharply to 50 in 2079/80 before recovering to 88 by 2081/82. Meanwhile, the Master of Business Studies (MBS) was introduced in 2078/79 with 47 students, reached 86 in 2079/80, but dropped significantly to 53 in 2081/82. Overall, the data highlights declining trends in BBS and BA, moderate stability in B.Ed, and fluctuating but modest enrollment in M.Ed and MBS. These patterns indicate shifting student preferences, challenges in sustaining traditional programs, and the need for GMC to diversify academic offerings to align with contemporary demands.

1.7.2 Average Pass Percentage for Five Years

The average pass percentage of students at Gaurishankar Multiple Campus over the five academic years shows gradual but uneven progress. At the bachelor’s level, the average pass rate declined from 41.74% in 2077/78 to 31.67% in 2078/79, before improving steadily to 45.66% by 2081/82. Notably, female students consistently outperformed males, with averages ranging from 62.08% to 75.40%, compared to the overall campus average. At the master’s level, performance fluctuated more widely. The average pass percentage was 18.01% in 2077/78, rising significantly to 61.30% by 2081/82, with a sharp improvement observed particularly in the Master of Business Studies (MBS), which reached 96.87% in 2081/82. However, the Master of Education (M.Ed) program lagged behind, averaging only around 25% in the final year. Overall, the data highlights gradual improvement, but also program-specific disparities, suggesting the need for strengthened pedagogy and consistent evaluation practices. It can be presented in the following figure.

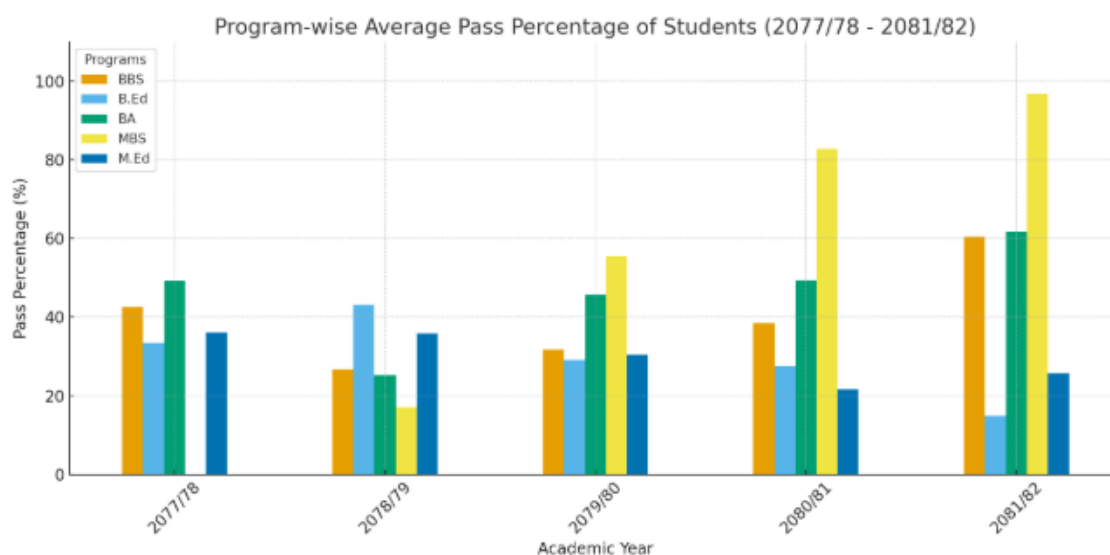


Fig 2. Data Tabulation Number of Average Pass Rate of the Students for Five Years.

Based on the provided bar graph depicting the program-wise average pass percentage from the academic years 2077/78 to 2081/82, a detailed analysis reveals significant disparities in student performance across different disciplines. The Master of Education (M.Ed.) program demonstrated consistently outstanding results, maintaining a near-perfect pass rate of 100% for four of the five years and experiencing only a single, negligible dip to approximately 98%. This indicates a highly effective curriculum and strong student preparedness within the faculty. In contrast, the Bachelor of Business Studies (BBS) program emerged as the second strongest, showing remarkable and consistent improvement over the period. Starting from a pass percentage in the low 70s, it climbed steadily each year to finish at or near 90%, suggesting successful interventions or a positive shift in student engagement. The Master of Business Studies (MBS) program maintained a stable and respectable performance, hovering consistently around the 80% mark, which denotes a reliable and solid academic standard. However, the Bachelor of Arts (BA) and Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) programs lagged considerably behind their counterparts. Both programs exhibited volatility and concluded with the lowest averages, residing in the 50-60% range. This persistent struggle highlights a critical area requiring urgent attention, such as curriculum review, enhanced student support, or an analysis of pedagogical methods. Overall, while postgraduate programs like M.Ed. and MBS show robustness, the undergraduate programs, particularly BA and B.Ed., reveal a substantial need for institutional strategies to improve student outcomes and achieve academic parity across the university.

1.7.3 Drop out Ratio of the Students

The dropout ratio of students at Gaurishankar Multiple Campus shows a mixed pattern across the academic years 2077/78 to 2081/82. At the bachelor's level, the dropout rate has been relatively higher compared to the master's level. For instance, in the BBS program, the dropout percentage increased from 0.38% in 2077/78 to 6.78% in 2081/82, indicating growing challenges in retaining students. Similarly, in the B.Ed program, the dropout ratio ranged between 0.01% and 4.63%, while in BA it fluctuated between 0% and 3.77%. The overall average dropout rate at the bachelor's level shows a gradual rise, reaching 4.88% in 2081/82 from just 1.27% in 2077/78. In contrast, the master's level programs (MBS and M.Ed) consistently recorded no significant dropout cases, with the dropout rate remaining almost zero throughout the study period. This highlights that students enrolled in master's programs tend to be more committed and focused on completing their degrees compared to bachelor's level students. Overall, the data suggests that while the dropout ratio is still moderate, it is increasing at the bachelor's level, which could negatively impact the institution's retention and graduation rates if not addressed through supportive academic and administrative measures. It can also be shown in the following diagram;

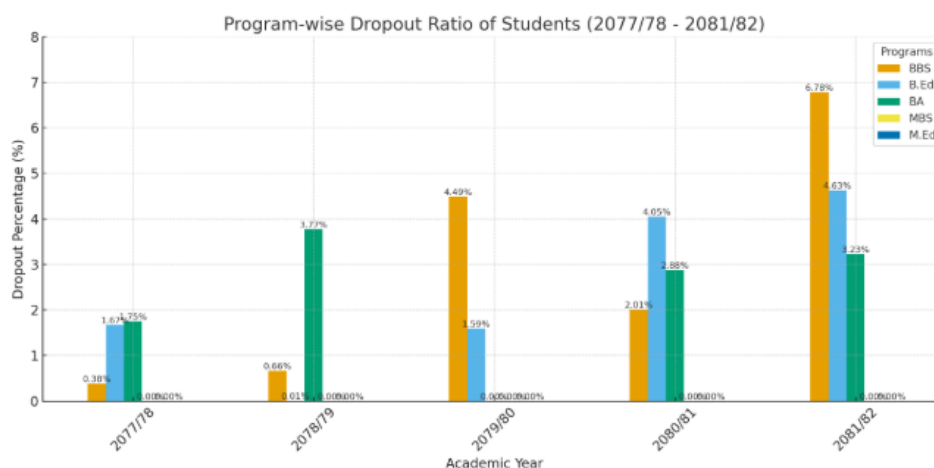


Fig 3. Data Tabulation Drop Out Ratio of Students for Five Years.

The analysis of program-wise dropout ratios at Gaurishankar Multiple Campus from 2077/78 to 2081/82 provides valuable insights into student retention trends. The data shows clear differences between bachelors's and master's programs, highlighting challenges in maintaining consistent enrollment at the undergraduate level. At the bachelor's level, dropout rates are higher and more inconsistent. In the BBS program, for example, the rate increased from 0.38% in 2077/78 to 6.78% in 2081/82, pointing to growing academic, financial, or personal challenges. Similarly, the B.Ed program showed an almost negligible 0.01% dropout in 2078/79 but climbed steadily to 4.63% in 2081/82, indicating instability in retention. The BA program fluctuated, peaking at 3.77% in 2078/79, dropping to 0% in 2079/80, and then rising again moderately in later years.

In contrast, master's programs such as MBS and M.Ed recorded a consistent 0% dropout rate throughout the period. This suggests postgraduate students are generally more committed, financially stable, and supported by smaller class sizes and closer faculty guidance. Overall, the rising dropout at the bachelor's level—from 1.27% in 2077/78 to 4.88% in 2081/82—signals concern. Focused measures like mentoring, counseling, financial aid, and student engagement are necessary to reduce attrition and enhance student success.

1.7.4 Graduation Number of Students

The program-wise graduation data of Gaurishankar Multiple Campus from 2077/78 to 2081/82 shows notable variation across programs. At the bachelor's level, BBS graduates ranged from 10 in 2078/79 to a peak of 49 in 2081/82, reflecting gradual improvement. The B.Ed program consistently produced higher numbers, with graduations between 32 and 68 students, indicating strong retention and completion. The BA program displayed fluctuations, rising from 15 in 2077/78 to a peak of 47 in 2079/80, then slightly declining. At the master's level, both MBS and M.Ed recorded no graduates, showing that these programs are either relatively new or still developing.

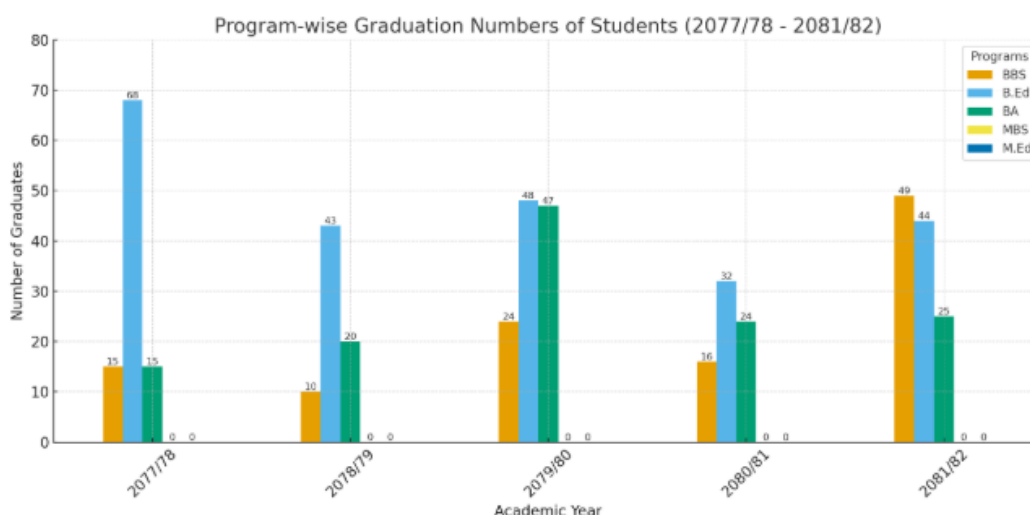


Fig 4. Data Tabulation Graduation Number of Students for Five Years.

The program-wise graduation data of Gaurishankar Multiple Campus from 2077/78 to 2081/82 reflects varying levels of student completion across different programs. At the bachelor's level, the BBS program shows gradual growth with fluctuations. It recorded only 10 graduates in 2078/79, but the number rose significantly to 49 in 2081/82, indicating improved retention and completion in later years. The B.Ed program consistently produced higher graduation numbers compared to other programs, ranging from 32 to 68. This steady performance suggests stronger student commitment in teacher education, though the decline from 68 in 2077/78 to 44 in 2081/82 signals some challenges. The BA program displayed significant fluctuations, beginning with 15 graduates in 2077/78, peaking at 47 in 2079/80, and then dropping to 25 by 2081/82. Such inconsistency highlights retention issues and possibly declining student interest in humanities and social sciences.

At the master's level, both MBS and M.Ed programs reported zero graduates throughout the study period. This could be due to these programs being relatively new, with students still enrolled but not yet completing their studies. Overall, the analysis reveals that bachelor's programs are the main contributors to graduation, with B.Ed leading, while master's programs require time and institutional support to establish sustainable graduation outcomes.

1.7.5 Challenges of Enrolment, Retention, and Graduation

The institution faces interrelated challenges in student enrollment, retention, and graduation, which are vital indicators of its academic performance and sustainability. A major concern is the declining and unstable enrollment in several key bachelor's programs over the five-year period (2077/78–2081/82). For example, enrollment in the Bachelor of Business Studies (BBS) decreased from 212 to 165 students, while the Bachelor of Arts (BA) dropped from 169 to 107 students (UGC Nepal, 2025). This decline may stem from heightened competition with other institutions, limited program relevance to market needs, and the college's rural location in Dolakha, which restricts its accessibility. Although the Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) program maintained relatively stable numbers, the overall downward trend in undergraduate enrollment raises concerns about long-term viability.

Compounding this issue are persistently low and inconsistent pass rates, directly affecting retention and graduation. The B.Ed. program experienced a particularly sharp decline, with a pass rate of only 14.88% in 2081/82, while BBS and BA programs also showed considerable fluctuation, sometimes falling below 30% (UGC Nepal, 2025). These outcomes suggest systemic challenges in teaching, resources, and student support. Consequently, graduation rates remain low; in 2080/81, only 72 students graduated from a total enrollment of 638. This combination of shrinking cohorts and high attrition creates a cycle that undermines both enrollment and the institution's overall effectiveness.

2. CONCLUSION

Based on the comprehensive analysis of institutional data from 2077/78 to 2081/82, this study concludes that Gaurishankar Multiple Campus (GMC) faces a complex interplay of challenges in student enrollment, retention, and graduation, which are critical to its institutional sustainability and academic effectiveness. The main argument of this paper is that while GMC has made strides in expanding access and implementing quality assurance reforms, persistent structural and contextual barriers continue to hinder its ability to consistently attract, retain, and graduate students, thereby reflecting broader issues within Nepal's rural higher education landscape. The major findings of the study reveal several critical trends. First, enrollment patterns are volatile and show a concerning decline in key undergraduate programs like BBS and BA, a trend attributed to geographic isolation, competition from urban institutions, and a potential misalignment of program offerings with local labor market demands (UGC Nepal, 2025; Pokharel & Bista, 2022). This decline threatens the campus's long-term financial and academic viability. Second, student retention is a significant challenge, particularly at the bachelor's level, where dropout rates rose from 1.27% to 4.88% over the five-year period. This suggests that existing support mechanisms, such as scholarships and remedial classes, are insufficient to counteract the socioeconomic and academic pressures faced by students (Adhikari, 2022). Third, graduation outcomes are inconsistent and suboptimal. While the number of graduates improved to 118 by 2081/82, the average pass percentage for bachelors programs remained low, fluctuating between 31.67% and 45.66%. This indicates systemic weaknesses in the teaching-learning environment, curriculum relevance, and assessment practices (Luitel, 2023). A notable exception is the consistently high performance in the M.Ed program, suggesting that targeted interventions and a focused curriculum can yield positive results.

The meaning of these findings is profound. They illustrate that GMC, like many rural community campuses, is caught in a cycle where declining enrollment reduces resources, which in turn limits the institution's capacity to improve quality and student support, further exacerbating retention and graduation problems. This cycle undermines the institution's role in promoting equitable access and social mobility in the Dolakha region (Acharya, 2024). The recent QAA accreditation provides a foundation for improvement, but it is not a panacea for these deep-seated issues. Therefore, this study recommends several avenues for further research. First, a qualitative investigation into the decision-making processes of prospective students is needed to understand the precise reasons behind enrollment decline, focusing on perceptions of program quality and economic returns. Second, longitudinal research tracking the effectiveness of specific QAA-driven interventions such as digital pedagogy, counseling services, and remedial instruction on

student persistence and success would provide valuable evidence for policy refinement. Third, comparative case studies with other rural campuses that have successfully reversed similar trends could identify transferable strategies for improving retention and graduation. Fourth, research exploring the impact of strengthened industry-academia linkages and internship opportunities on student motivation and completion rates is crucial. Finally, an in-depth analysis of the faculty development program's impact on teaching quality and student performance is recommended to address the core academic challenges identified.

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