Cover Page

DOI: http://ijmer.in.doi./2021/10.07.20.1.23.4

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF MULTIDISCIPLINARY EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH
ISSN:2277-7881; IMPACT FACTOR :7.816(2021); IC VALUE:5.16; ISI VALUE:2.286
Peer Reviewed and UGC listed and Refereed Journal: VOLUME:10, ISSUE:7(1), July: 2021
Online Copy of Article Publication Available: www.ijmer.in
Digital certificate of publication: http://ijmer.in/pdf/e-Certificate%20of%20Publication-IJMER.pdf
Scopus Review ID: A2B96D3ACF3FEA2A
Article Received: 4th July
Publication Date:30th July 2021

POPULATION EDUCATION: ITS NEED AND IMPORTANCE IN THE PRESENT CONTEXT

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Abstract:

The present paper attempts to show that rapid and unregulated growth of population has become a major socio-economic concern in the present century, creating serious obstacles in the path of sustainable development and lowering the standard of living, especially in developing nations like India. The ever-increasing population puts immense pressure on limited natural resources and adversely affects various aspects of human life, such as employment, housing, health, nutrition, education, and environment. It leads to problems like poverty, overcrowding, water scarcity, pollution, illiteracy, and social unrest, which collectively hinder national progress and individual well-being. Therefore, the present study focuses on the basic idea of population education and clarifies how it is different from conventional sex education and family planning initiatives. While sex education primarily deals with biological and physiological aspects of reproduction and family planning emphasizes methods of birth control, population education is a much broader concept. It is an educational process that helps learners understand the causes and consequences of population growth and its relationship with economic development, natural resources, environment, family welfare, and quality of life. Besides, it examines the importance of demographic trends, effective use of human resources, proper distribution of resources, and the impact on the environment to show why awareness about population issues must be made an integral part of both formal and informal education. The main purpose of economic and social development is to improve the quality of life and to make people productive assets for the nation, which is not possible without stabilizing population growth. In essence, population education seeks to develop among young people the ability to take rational decisions, along with the right values and attitudes, which are essential for controlling population growth and ensuring long-term well-being of society. Since today's students are tomorrow's parents and citizens, inculcating correct attitudes at an early age will help them make responsible choices regarding family size and resource utilization, thereby contributing to population stabilization and sustainable development. This is the thrust of the paper.

Keywords: Population Education, Quality of Life, Sustainable Development.

Introduction:

The present-day scenario of human society shows that uncontrolled population growth has emerged as one of the most critical challenges confronting humanity, profoundly undermining the quality of life, particularly in developing nations such as India, where the consequences of overpopulation manifest in the form of pervasive poverty, unemployment, inadequate housing, malnutrition and under-nutrition, environmental pollution, water scarcity, illiteracy, juvenile delinquency, political instability, terrorism and human trafficking, among others. According to World Population Prospects[i], the global population was estimated at approximately 7.7 billion in October 2019, with projections indicating that it would surpass 8 billion by 2024 and approach 9 billion by 2042, while India's population alone stood at 1.36 billion in mid-2019. The demographic imbalance is further evident from the fact that India, with only 2.4% of the world's total land area, supports about 17.71% of the global population, and it was projected that India would overtake China as the world's most populous nation by 2045.[ii] Since the core objective of economic and social development is to enhance the quality of human life and transform the population into productive assets, achieving sustainable development with equitable distribution becomes exceedingly difficult without population stabilization. Consequently, there is a growing realization that conventional population control measures must be complemented by formal population education aimed at cultivating appropriate attitudes, values, and rational decision-making abilities among youth from an early age, as today's children will be tomorrow's parents, and through such education, the commitment to curbing population growth can be

Cover Page

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strengthened and expanded among the vast younger generation.[iii] This is the reason why we should learn population education and its related concepts, which help us realize the need and importance of population education in the context of rapid population growth in the country.

Objectives: The main objectives of the paper are as follows:

(i) To explain the nature, scope and concept of population education.
(ii) To provide conceptual clarity on population education in order to understand its importance in the context of present-day population growth.
(iii) To highlight the need and importance of population education in checking the problem of population explosion in the country.

Methodology: The present paper is descriptive and analytical in nature and is primarily based on secondary sources of data collected from various published sources such as books, journals, research articles, reports of UNESCO and UNFPA, World Population Prospects, Census of India, Government reports, and other authentic websites, which have been systematically analyzed and interpreted to explain the nature, scope and concept of population education and to highlight its need and importance in the present context of rapid population growth.

Findings and Analysis:

Before delving into the problem, it is essential to understand the concept of population education. This is because one may come across concepts such as birth control, family planning, and sex education in relation to population control in day-to-day life. The relevance of population education actually hinges on this, as the concept is much wider in scope. Although many people use the term population education interchangeably with birth control, family planning, and sex education, there are significant differences among them. It is important to note that population education, as the name itself indicates, is an *educational programme* consisting of two words: *population* and *education*. Here, one may ask, what does population actually mean? It can be said that population, in general, refers to the number of people inhabiting a specified geographical area, be it a village, district, country, or the world as a whole, or belonging to any particular race, religion, sex, class, caste, group, community, and so on. Again, the next question that arises is, what is education? Education is the process that imparts, improves, or changes the knowledge, information, understanding, attitudes, skills, abilities, practices, and many other attributes of people for their effective performance in life as an individual and as a member of the family, society, nation, and the world. Accordingly, if we consider the two terms — *population* and *education* — a few questions arise: What type of education should be imparted? To whom should it be imparted? And to what extent? The purpose is to help people understand matters related to population. However, answering these questions is not easy. It poses a serious challenge for population educators and educationists. To address this challenge, several educationists and organizations have attempted to define population education in a more systematic way.

According to UNESCO (1970), "Population education is an educational programme which provides for a study of the population situation in the family, community, nation and world, with the purpose of developing in the students rational and responsible attitudes and behaviour towards that situation."[iv] Stephen Viederman defines population education as "the process by which the student investigates and explores the nature and meaning of population processes, population characteristics, the causes of population change and the consequences of these processes, characteristics and changes for himself, his family, his society and the world."[v] What these definitions reveal is that population education involves people in the learning process and widens their understanding of population-related issues from a broader perspective. It helps in developing appropriate skills in analyzing and defining issues in a way that is both personally meaningful and socially relevant. Moreover, population education not only develops a proper attitude among students towards population problems but also develops the capacity to take rational decisions regarding problems arising out of rapid population growth. In fact, population education covers any or all matters related to population and influences development, standard of living, and quality of life. Thus, population matters are

Cover Page

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comprehensive and inclusive, thereby forming the content of population education that enables people in general to take rational and responsible decisions.

It is important to clarify that population education should not be confused with family planning or sex education. While they are often mentioned together, they are fundamentally different. Sex education primarily focuses on sexual health, prevention of sexually transmitted diseases, and reproductive matters. Family planning, on the other hand, is mainly concerned with married couples and adopts a clinical or medical approach to regulating family size. In fact, family planning is only one theme within the broader scope of population education. The main difference lies in their focus. Sex education lays stress on the individual, while population education emphasizes the interrelationship between the individual, the family, society, and the nation. Unlike the clinical nature of family planning, population education is purely an educational programme aimed at creating awareness and developing a proper understanding of population matters. In this context, V. K. R. V. Rao observes, "...population education is essentially related to human resource development. Thus, population education is not only concerned with population awareness but also with developing values and attitudes so that both quality and quantity (of population) are taken care of."[vi] Similarly, Burbson defines it as, "Population education is an exploration of knowledge and attitudes about population, family and sex. It includes population awareness, family living, reproduction education and basic values."[vii] In his *Population Education: A Conceptual Framework*, R. C. Sharma states, "Population education is the study of human population in relation to his environment with a view to improve his quality of life without adversely affecting the environment."[viii]

Having distinguished population education from allied fields, the most pertinent question that arises is: what is its true nature? Population education is a relatively new field of study. As population matters are not constant and keep changing, the concept of population education has also gradually evolved, adapting itself to changing needs, requirements, and emerging issues and concerns. The nature of population education can be summarized as below:

(i) *Focus on both Quality and Quantity*: By its very nature, population refers not only to the quantitative aspect or just an essay in numbers, but also to the qualitative aspects of human population, i.e., quality of life. Therefore, population education is essentially related to human resource development.

(ii) *Purely an Educational Programme*: Population education is purely an educational programme. Like any other educational programme, it helps students in developing their knowledge, understanding, skills, attitudes, and values with regard to its content materials.

(iii) *Multidisciplinary in Nature*: Its concept is multidisciplinary and is related to a number of disciplines such as biology, sociology, economics, geography, and demography.

(iv) *Multi-level Perspective*: It provides a learning situation for understanding the population situation in the family, community, nation, and world at large.

(v) *Concern for Well-being*: It helps to understand the implications of population factors for the well-being of the individual, the family, and the society.

(vi) *Man-Environment Relationship*: Population education studies the relationship of man with his environment with regard to his quality of life.

(vii) *Study of Population Change*: What makes population change over time constitutes a primary concern of population education. It is equally concerned with the effects that such changes can produce in families, communities, nations, and the world. Thus, it involves the study of the causes and consequences of population change. These causes and consequences may be biological, social, economic, political, and cultural in nature.

(viii) *Relationship with Development*: The content of population education mainly revolves around the relationship between population factors on the one hand and various socio-economic processes on the other. Population change and development are interdependent.

(ix) *Decision-Oriented*: Population change at any level - family, community, or nation - is the result of decisions based on certain considerations, which are considered rational in the given situation or context. Whether the decisions are rational or not depends upon their understanding of all the relevant matters at that particular level.

Cover Page

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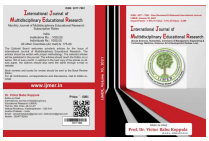
DOI: http://ijmer.in.doi./2021/10.07.20.1.23.4

(x) *Micro and Macro Relevance*: This is what is precisely meant by population education - knowledge, understanding, attitudes, and practices/behaviours of people in respect of their population situation, that is intended to lead to such population change which influences the quality of their lives, both at present and in the future. Therefore, it has a bearing on various population matters at both the micro and macro levels in the present and the future.

In view of the above, the general objectives of population education as laid down in the Workshop organized by NCERT (1971) at New Delhi can be stated as follows:

(i) To develop an understanding of basic demographic concepts and processes.
(ii) To develop among the younger generation an understanding of the most significant phenomenon of the modern world, i.e., rapid growth of population and its causes.
(iii) To develop an understanding of the influence of population trends on various aspects of human life - social, cultural, political, and economic.
(iv) To develop an understanding of the close interaction between population growth and the process of development, with particular reference to development programmes for raising the living standards of the people.
(v) To develop an understanding of the evil effects of over-population on the environment and the concomitant dangers arising from pollution.
(vi) To develop an understanding of how scientific and medical advancements have enabled greater control over famines and diseases, and ultimately death, and the imbalance thus created between death rate and birth rate.
(vii) To develop an understanding of the biological factors and the phenomenon of reproduction which are responsible for the continuance of the species.
(viii) To develop attitudes of responsibility, mutual help, and cooperation in all aspects of personal and family living.
(ix) To develop an appreciation of the relationship between maternal health, child welfare, and small family size; and
(x) To create awareness of the population policies and programmes of the country.

Now, the most interesting question one can ask is: what is the scope of population education? The scope of population education is determined by its objectives, and therefore it is extremely vast and comprehensive. It is not confined to a single discipline but is interdisciplinary in nature, encompassing within its fold almost every aspect of human life that is directly or indirectly affected by population dynamics. It is worthy to note here that it begins with the study of basic demographic concepts and processes such as fertility, mortality, migration, age and sex composition, density and distribution of population, and then extends to understanding the determinants and consequences of population growth. It examines the relationship between population growth and economic development, including its impact on per capita income, employment, savings, investment and poverty; the relationship between population and social development, covering aspects like health and nutrition, housing, education, family welfare and status of women; the relationship between population and environment, dealing with ecological imbalance, depletion of natural resources, pollution, deforestation and sustainable development; and the relationship between population and family life, including family size, family planning, responsible parenthood, reproductive health and family welfare programmes. It also includes the study of population policies and programmes both at the national and international levels, the biological aspects concerning human reproduction, heredity, growth and development, and the need for inculcating rational attitudes, values and responsible behaviour among learners towards population matters so that they can make informed decisions in their personal, family and social life, thereby contributing to the improvement of the quality of life of the individual, family, community, nation and the world at large, which ultimately makes population education an essential component of general education at all levels of schooling, from primary to university stage, and even for out-of-school youth and adults through formal and non-formal channels.


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Accordingly, it follows that there is a great need and importance of population education at present. The need and importance of population education has arisen due to the population explosion and its adverse effects on every sphere of national life. In a developing country like India, where population growth has been a major obstacle to development, population education has become an indispensable part of general education. Rapid growth of population, particularly in developing countries, is growing at an alarming rate and creates numerous problems, and population education makes the younger generation aware of the causes and consequences of population explosion and develops a rational attitude towards it. Over-population leads to low per capita income, unemployment, underemployment, low savings and investment, and widespread poverty, and population education helps learners understand how population growth hampers economic development and why a small family norm is necessary for raising the standard of living. Excessive population creates heavy pressure on social infrastructure like education, health, housing, transport, and water supply, leading to overcrowded schools, lack of beds in hospitals, and acute housing problems, which population education highlights to create awareness for planned development. Similarly, over-population is one of the main causes of environmental degradation, deforestation, depletion of natural resources, pollution of air and water, and ecological imbalance, and population education develops environmental consciousness and a sense of responsibility towards sustainable development. Population growth also directly affects food security, as the demand for food increases while agricultural land decreases due to housing and industrialization, and population education helps to understand the need for balancing population growth with food production.

Moreover, the ultimate aim of all development is to improve the quality of life, but overpopulation lowers the quality of life by affecting nutrition, health, education, and overall well-being, and population education aims at improving the quality of life of the individual, family, and nation. Large family size affects the health of the mother and the welfare of the children, and population education teaches the importance of small family size, responsible parenthood, birth spacing, and maternal and child health, which are essential for a happy and healthy family life. Population education is not merely about giving information, but it develops desirable attitudes, values, and responsible behaviour and inculcates values like mutual respect, gender equality, respect for the small family norm, and concern for future generations. It also creates awareness about the population policies and programmes of the government, such as the National Population Policy and Family Welfare Programmes, and helps in their effective implementation through active participation of the people. At the micro-level, it enables individuals and families to make rational decisions regarding family size, age at marriage, and birth spacing, while at the macro-level, it enables citizens to understand population issues at national and global levels. Thus, in a nutshell, it can be said that population education is needed to transform the population from a quantitative burden into a qualitative human resource, and it is related to human resource development, because without population education, the goal of sustainable development and a better quality of life for all cannot be achieved.

Conclusion:

From the above discussion, it can be concluded that population education is not a narrow idea confined to birth control, family planning, or sex education, but is a broad, multidisciplinary, and purely educational programme that deals with the entire phenomenon of population. It seeks to develop rational and responsible attitudes and behaviour among learners regarding the population situation at the level of the family, community, nation, and the world. Its nature is dynamic and decision-oriented, concerned with both the qualitative and quantitative aspects of population, studying population change along with its interrelationship with the environment and development. In the present context, marked by a rapid explosion of population, particularly in developing countries, nobody can deny the need and importance of population education. Its need and importance have become more significant than ever before, as population growth has emerged as a major hindrance to economic development, social progress, environmental sustainability, and the improvement of quality of life, exerting pressure on per capita income, employment opportunities, food supply, housing, health, and education, putting a strain on natural resources, and leading to ecological imbalance and resource depletion. Thus, population education, with its vast scope covering demography, economic and social development, environment, family life, reproductive health, and population policies, creates awareness about the causes and consequences of population growth, and more importantly, it does not merely provide information but fosters values, attitudes, and skills related to responsible parenthood, the small family norm, gender equality, and sustainable development, enabling

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individuals to take rational decisions at the micro-level concerning age at marriage, size of the family, and spacing of births, and at the macro-level to understand and actively participate in national population policies and programmes. Therefore, it can be said that population education is essential for transforming the population from a mere quantitative burden into a qualitative human resource and is fundamentally linked to human resource development, because without population education, the objectives of sustainable development, social justice, and a better quality of life for the individual, family, community, nation, and the world at large cannot be achieved. Hence, population education should be made an integral part of general education at all stages, from the primary to the university level, and also for out-of-school youth and adults through both formal and non-formal channels, so that present and future generations become aware of their responsibilities in building a balanced and prosperous society.

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