

From Classrooms to Coaching: Understanding the Crisis of Trust in School Education

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Abstract

In today's hyper-competitive world, the pursuit of success often begins with academic excellence. Education, once revered not only as a tool for employment but also as a powerful instrument of socialization and personal transformation, is undergoing a silent shift. Traditionally, schools have been seen as the foundational spaces for holistic development. However, a growing number of students are now migrating from formal classrooms to private coaching centres in the belief that these alternative spaces offer more targeted preparation, guaranteed results, and higher chances of success in competitive examinations. This shift has led to a crisis of trust in the schooling system. Students increasingly perceive schools as insufficient in addressing their academic and aspirational needs, relying instead on coaching institutes for confidence, clarity, and performance. As a result, the classroom—once a central site of learning—faces erosion in relevance and credibility. This paper, grounded in secondary data sources, aims to explore this aspirational migration toward coaching hubs, critically examining the factors contributing to the declining faith in school education. It highlights how this trend reflects broader social, economic, and cultural anxieties tied to success, mobility, and the instrumentalization of education in modern India.

Keywords: Coaching culture, educational aspirations, school education, trust in institutions, pedagogical gap, India, Shadow Education

Introduction

With the growing obsession for academic excellence and competitive success, a new industry has firmly rooted itself within the Indian education system—the coaching industry. Coaching in education is not just about extra classes; it is a collaborative approach where an experienced educator mentors a student or fellow teacher to enhance instructional techniques, learning strategies, and overall professional development. It emphasizes self-reflection, goal-setting, and personalized feedback to improve educational outcomes and nurture continuous growth (Coaching (Education) Academia.edu, n.d.). Private coaching refers to additional academic support provided outside the formal school system, aimed at improving students' performance in competitive entrance exams for admission to reputed educational institutions. It also assists individuals in preparing for examinations that help secure employment in the organized sector (Ashok & Jangir, 2024). Originally, coaching began as a support mechanism for students struggling to keep pace with academic demands, helping them cope with school curricula (Desk, 2018). However, over time, it has transformed into a parallel education system, often overshadowing formal

schooling itself. By 2024, India's private tutoring sector was valued at approximately ₹58,000 crore, with an expected annual growth rate of 15%. The surge is largely fuelled by the intense focus on STEM education and the high-pressure environment of competitive entrance examinations (PWOnlyIAS, 2025). Students across the country now heavily invest in coaching centres, viewing them as essential to cracking the nation's most prestigious exams. Balancing school attendance with five to six hours of coaching daily has become nearly impossible. As a result, many students opt for "dummy schools"—a rising trend where coaching institutes advise students to enroll in schools only for the purpose of appearing in board exams, while focusing their academic energy entirely on coaching. This practice has deeply compromised the integrity of the formal school system. Dummy schools, by prioritizing exam results over actual learning, are undermining the broader purpose of education. They reduce the process of learning to mere test preparation, stripping it of creativity, critical thinking, and holistic development (PWOnlyIAS, 2025). In the current educational landscape, a significant number of students attend school not as a primary site of learning, but merely to fulfil institutional obligations such as appearing for exams and completing practical work. The substantive process of education, however, has shifted to private coaching centres, which are increasingly perceived as the true arenas of academic engagement. This shift gives rise to the shadow education, it refers to private supplementary tutoring or coaching that exists outside of the formal school system, but *mimics* and *supplements* the mainstream curriculum. This shift reflects a broader phenomenon of *role displacement*, where the traditional role of the school as the central pedagogical institution is being undermined. Across the country there are several cities like Kota, Delhi, Hyderabad etc has emerged as the coaching hub globally. India presents a great example of shadow or coaching education culture globally, as it is rooted in intense competition within the academic arena. This culturally focused education is driven by parental aspirations, dissatisfaction with school-level teachings, along with high-stakes entrance exams such as JEE, NEET, and CUET (Gupta, 2024).

Coaching Culture

Due to societal expectations, parents' expectations and herd mentality, most students join coaching classes. Coaching institutes create a mindset where students begin to believe that without joining these classes, they won't be successful in the future. To reinforce this belief, they often showcase their former students who have cleared competitive exams as examples of success (Bansal, 2017). Private coaching can be broadly classified into three categories based on its purpose and impact. The first type aims to support and enhance school-level academic learning. The second focuses on preparing students for entrance into prestigious higher education institutions. The third type is geared toward helping individuals prepare for competitive exams to secure employment in the formal sector (Ashok & Jangir, 2024). There is a significant difference between the learning processes in schools and coaching institutes. Coaching centres focus primarily on subjects related to exam preparation—mainly Physics, Chemistry, Biology, and Mathematics. During these critical teenage years, when students could be exploring a variety of subjects and developing their overall personality, they are instead confined to a narrow, exam-oriented approach often referred to as 'lousy learning'. This focus sidelines important subjects like literature, vocational education, and co-curricular activities, which are essential in schools for fostering creativity and holistic development. The intense competition for admission into prestigious higher education institutions and the scarcity of formal sector job opportunities compared to the vast number of applicants have made the race for success increasingly difficult. Moreover, the content of competitive exams often differs significantly from that of the regular academic curriculum, pushing students to seek additional support through private

coaching. The popularity of coaching institutes is further fuelled by their aggressive marketing strategies, which shape public perception and demand. The scale and influence of private coaching are deeply intertwined with the limitations and structure of mainstream schooling. The study paints a clear picture: senior secondary students largely embrace private coaching, not just as an academic boost, but as a necessary supplement to their schooling. They see coaching as filling the gaps left by overcrowded classrooms and rushed teaching, offering the personalized attention they crave. Nearly half (47.1%) view teachers who coach favourably, appreciating their extra efforts beyond school hours, while only a small group (9.44%) voice dissatisfaction. Students believe most teachers coach not just for money, but to genuinely help. However, some worry that coaching may take priority over school duties. Interestingly, views on coaching cut across gender, location, and school type—highlighting a shared student sentiment: schools alone aren't enough. With flexible schedules and focused support for struggling learners, coaching is seen as a lifeline, not a luxury. The study calls for a balanced approach, where coaching complements, not competes with, formal education (Beri & Ber, 2013). According to the case study, done by (Parmar & Dubey, 2024) tells us that technology has changed the meaning of education and coaching is supporting us to cope up with such changes. They said schools are not empowered enough to provide their children academic strength as well as their wards are not capable of understanding what is really taught in schools.

A Systemic Shift: Coaching as the New Academic Norm

It is seen from the past few years that there is a transition in which school students started focusing on the coaching and using school merely for enrollment rest for the studies they focus on clearing the competitive exams for further higher education and use schools as only dummy. Students, particularly in senior secondary classes, report that school teachers often become disengaged, delivering rote, textbook-based instruction with minimal pedagogical innovation. There appears to be a tacit understanding among educators that students are supplementing—or even replacing—school learning with private coaching. This leads to what can be described as a form of *institutional abdication*, where schools relinquish their responsibility for deep learning, reinforcing a mechanical "syllabus completion" model. In recent years, there has been a noticeable shift in students' academic priorities. School-going students increasingly treat schools as mere formalities—places to maintain enrolment records and appear for board exams—while devoting their actual learning time and effort to coaching institutes. These students view coaching classes as the real avenue for academic success, especially when it comes to cracking competitive entrance exams. This phenomenon has given rise to a "dummy schooling" culture, where schools are sidelined in favour of goal-oriented, exam-centric preparation. Such a scenario not only erodes students' trust in formal schooling but also highlights deeper issues of *educational stratification*—where access to quality education is increasingly determined by one's ability to afford private coaching. The commodification of education thus creates parallel systems of learning, perpetuating inequalities and raising critical questions about the legitimacy, accountability, and purpose of public and private schooling in contemporary society. Back in 2015, an expert panel appointed by the Ministry of Education (formerly the Union Human Resource Development Ministry) estimated that coaching institutes were generating a massive annual revenue of ₹24,000 crore. Fast forward to today, and the industry has more than doubled, with its current market value pegged at ₹58,088 crore, as per Infinium Global Research, a consultancy based in Pune. Projections suggest that by 2028, the coaching industry in India is expected to skyrocket to a staggering ₹1,33,995 crore—highlighting its rapid and sustained expansion (J. Yadav, 2022).

Shadow Education in India

In this competitive era students and their parents could compete to any extent. Due to this coaching culture in education instead of formal education there is a continuous stress to study and students undergo pressure. It is defined as an “Coached Habitus” to explain how coaching instills specific values, beliefs as well as the habits that equip students to navigate educational fields for competitive examinations (Gupta, 2025). Shadow schooling is the parallel schooling that happens along with private coaching. Students enrolled in private coaching for the preparation of competitive exams; at the same time, they enrolled themselves in the schools which could provide them the attendance for the completion of their secondary and senior secondary level of the formal education. Shadow education, refers to the supplement, private tutoring as well as coaching which provide education outside the formal school system. Students attend coaching classes instead of attending regular classrooms (Bray, 2021). Shadow education refers to the vast private tutoring and coaching ecosystem which runs parallel to the schooling system – which include a neighbourhood’s small tuition centres to massive coaching factories which prepare for competitive exams. It helps students to get into prestigious educational institutions which will give them better job security and prestige.

Earlier the coaching and private tuition facilities were available by the students who are quite weak in their studies and consider it as a temporary solution but now it has become a need of the students as well as parents. From a very early age students become part of some coaching institution for pre-nurture classes skipping the school classes and its related activities. Students skip the formal education in order to grab the seats in top-notch medical, engineering colleges.

Shift from Mainstream Schools to Coaching Institutes

Over the decades, the focus has been shifted from school education to coaching education. There are various reasons behind this. The most probable reason is the quality of teaching which is offered by the teachers in schools. A study done across Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh, which found due to inability to understand the teachers in schools, low teacher quality, and pressure to clear the exams are some primary reasons due to which they opt for coaching/tuitions irrespective whether it is the government, private and private-aided schools opt for private tuition (Sujatha, 2014). Recent study shows that, after COVID-19 this coaching industry shows increasing surge in tutoring enrolment as a reflection of social status. Becoming the part of coaching centres is a mark of prestige in Indian households (Baruah & Wankhar, 2024). According to economist Kishor Darak notes that entering into higher education through the coaching industry is considered a “gatekeeper” to opportunity (Jadhav, 2026). A Mixed method study of secondary students of Coimbatore and Chennai, does not consider merely as a support but it is seen as a risk management against unreliable school systems (Shyamsundar & Uma Raman, 2025). Another reason for this shift to coaching at student level, is that it often bridges the gap in understanding classroom instructions. Due to inability to follow the classroom teachings, poor quality teaching, and inadequate in-class support systems. Apart from these personal reasons to excel in life to achieve a competitive academic ladder. Some social reasons include peer pressure to do the same as friends, parental desire without analysing whether their child wants the same or not. (Baruah & Wankhar, 2024).

The Asymmetry of Shadow Education: Minor Gains, Major Liabilities

Though the positive impacts of Coaching culture as a replacement of schools have no major positive impacts. However, it provides support to the students by providing appropriate support through practice,

exam-focused strategies that many students find helpful for their preparations. Students find it helpful, especially for high-stakes board exams and entrance exams (NEET, JEE etc) (Udenia, 2025). Tuitions and coaching take care of individual learning gaps, provide customized materials to study which schools won't provide. It also provides special attention to students by helping in the weak area of study. (*Coaching Industry and Right to Education | PDF | Vocational Education | Education Policy*, n.d.). Schools suffer from teacher shortages and weak pedagogy, lack of proper infrastructure. Shadow education acts as a substitute that keeps students strong academically. Poor schooling system leads to the growth of the coaching industry (Surana, 2026). Education which is provided in schools which is generally focused on syllabus completion, poor teaching quality, exam-driven learning, and rising parental aspirations for better academic outcomes have contributed to this reliance on private tuition/coaching (Thomas, 2025). Coaching classes are considered as an essential part of academics nowadays. Parents spend a significant amount of their child's education in coaching. The coaching classes have spread from one-to-one instruction to large sized online classes for students. It is evident that there is no clear positive impact of coaching on academic outcomes (Ashok & Jangir, 2024). Educationists and psychologists are alarmed and are calling for a large-scale survey to study the industry, especially at the school level where kindergarten children rely on private tuitions (J. Yadav, 2022). A study done which also unfolds that, teachers of the schools also involved in teaching in some private coaching or taking personal tuitions. So, they follow slow pace teaching; they don't teach properly in school classrooms. Even if the teachers of school are not taking any classes by themselves. They have misinterpretation that the students are taking some supplementary classes somewhere (Bray, 2014).

Beyond the Benefits: Assessing the Downside

Shadow education in India reflects deeper problems in the formal system — inconsistent school quality, extremely competitive and limited seats at top institutions, and an exam-centric culture. It's simultaneously a coping mechanism for these problems and, in aggregate, a contributor to some of them (inequality, stress, undermining of public-school investment). Students undergo severe stress in the current system of education. This brings stress and pressure to both students and parents.

The quality of education remains inadequate regardless of whether a student attends an expensive or highly expensive school. Studies argues that not enrolling children in coaching institutes may negatively impact their future prospects. Moitra further notes that coaching centres have become a necessary part of the education system, functioning as substitutes or "proxy schools" for many students (Nanda, 2019).

After long hours of schooling and tuition/coaching, students get exhausted and have got very little time to rest and play or doing any developmental activities. On an average student is spending 10-12 hours on studies itself which is quite a harmful and not advisable for human development. There is a lack of personal life, and social development (Francis, 2016). Students get more focused on completing the work given by both schools and coaching. This gruelling routine creates pressure and stress to achieve and score high than the rest of the students. Mental well-being of students often gets neglected which should be the priority. This creates stress, anxiety, and increases suicidal tendencies among students as they got fear of getting fail in exams or not able to fulfil the expectations of family. As per the reports 1.2% of students commit suicide due to failure (Anis, 2024). According to the data, students around 3.33% who don't take any coaching suffer from academic stress. But on the other side around 44.45% students who take coaching suffer from burnout, anxiety stress (SRCC, 2026).

Coaching's are taking place of regular schools. People prefer to send their kids to regular coaching instead of schools. Coaching classes focus only on cracking the competition exams. Prioritizing only on achieving high scores affects the comprehensive development of a student. Coaching education sidelines the developmental activities. Co-Curricular Activities are the part of school education, through which a student develops creative thinking, communication skills and emotional intelligence. Consequently, well-rounded pursuits such as arts, sports, and extracurricular activities take a back seat (Anis, 2024).

The aim of Education is to narrow down that gap between rich and poor but it does opposite i.e., children from wealthy families could afford the better tutors, better coaching for their wards which widened the gap between rich and poor. On the other hand, students from the lower background won't be able to pay such hefty amount to coaching industry as fees which creates 'education divide' (Anis, 2024). A study shows that cost of coaching is unevenly distributed, people from affluent families, urban backgrounds and upper caste families are able to afford coaching lower rung of society finds it difficult to do so (Aggarwal, 2024). Parents have to pay school as well as coaching fees to make their ward score good marks in exams as well as prepare him for entrance exam simultaneously. Those who have the privilege to afford this could be able to join coaching as well as school, rest would face the financial challenges. Parents who can't afford take heavy loans or sell their property to teach their child. This system of education has created "pay to compete" layer on top of formal education systems. Schools provide critical secondary socialization, instilling discipline, social hierarchies, communication, and emotional resilience. However, the commercial coaching ecosystem circumvents this foundational process by reducing education to an intense, exam-focused drill, often displacing peer connection and social development with isolation and hyper-competition. Parents as well as students don't consider schools are capable enough to focus on academics. According to parents, schools don't focus on creating a channel to get into country's top-class institutions and don't prepare them for any competition. They have analysed that school education isn't enough to teach their children about the depth of exams which help them to get into prestigious institutions. Shadow education has reduced social interaction among students i.e., they have got less time for peer relationships, family bonding or any form of informal relations (Liang et al., 2022). Parents don't want to waste their child's time on any other activity than preparing for the exam. Due to this, students get affected they have constant pressure to get into better batches by scoring high so that they could get best teachers and understand the subject in a better way. A study conducted with 200 students of class 12 in Chandigarh on students preparing for Medicine and Engineering entrance found trends among students which are alarming, an impact on their psychological and emotional well-being (Sharma & Kaur, 2024). India's coaching system has direct link with student suicides, along with erosion of creativity and mounting guilt over not clearing the exams despite paying heavy amount make them depressed and frustrated. A student started his journey for entrance exams as early as 13 years old or during his teenage, where he focused on only clearing the entrance exams may never experience a connection with peers, teachers, different recreational classes or playground (Yadav, 2016). Students are solely focused on getting good scores in exams and outstand from the rest which kills the creativity of a student and thinking capacity.

Navigating Structural Challenges and Institutional Interventions

As the coaching/shadow education has widespread — private coaching or tutoring started taking places of school education and mirroring the formal educational institutional learning increases the socioeconomic division, this sidelines real objectives of real education. This widens the socioeconomic gap and focuses majorly on scoring high marks. Educational distortions caused by this educational system

need governance policies that balances both. Government should not focus on shutting down coaching completely, can't ignore it too.

It should enforce quality-assurance and disclosure protocols on private providers, curb exploitative commercial recruitment, and provide targeted public remedial support to bridge access divides for marginalized students. In tandem, structural reform must overhaul the high-stakes examination regimes fuelling tutoring demand, while elevating pedagogical standards and instructional rigor inside mainstream schools. Systematically embedding commercial tutoring within broader educational policy—rather than leaving it to open-market forces—enables governments to preserve equity, alleviate student distress, and reinforce the foundational role of public schooling.

The expansion of shadow education—private tutoring has started mirroring formal education—which has deepened socioeconomic divisions and sidelined the curriculum goals/ institutional learning objectives of the main education. To address these distortions, which requires regulatory policies that don't fully blanket ban the coaching education or give full access to it. Instead take the way which addresses the problem in a right way. Regulation on shadow education should be done, rather than leaving it to open market forces. Policy design should be done in order to keep the quality of education as priority, to curb commercial recruitment, provide remedial to bridge access divides for marginalized students. A proper structural reform should be taken to elevate pedagogical standards in schools. Government should enable to preserve equity, alleviate students' distress, reinforce the foundational role of public schooling, transparency in fees, coaching hours, and marketing the right way to educate the students. Schooling should be compulsory instead of sidelining it. Students should encourage to study majorly on their own. After schooling they could join any coaching center for their future prospects. Schools should take regular feedback of students, proper teachers training should be provided, so as to improve pedagogical practices. Schools should also focus on preparation of competitive exams apart from board exams, by taking extra classes or any supplementary classes. Proper guidance should be given to children for their future prospects.

Conclusion

Education should be the part of learning not a part of competition. Students should teach skills and made them believing in mastering those skills instead of focusing on the scores and percentage. As per the data the rural areas education is backed by Government schools and in urban areas the education is handled by private coaching and tuitions (TOI, 2025). Government has to take certain measure to prepare a guideline in order to balance the alternate of schools, overly relying on coaching classes is not the good basis of education. Else, the concept of school education merely becomes an exam taking machinery and the school which was not only the agency of socialization, but also the gateway where student learns values, rules and regulations, morality will vanish. Through NEP 2020 the government tries to establish a strong foundation for the school education but the law has not yet framed strong which could curtail this type of education system where students skip the schools in order to get the seats in medical, engineering or any other exam.

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