

Teacher shortage, poor pay, other failures fuel tuition trap

THE education system is caught in a paradox where a booming coaching industry quietly fills the gaps. Academics and guardians report that teachers across the spectrum often supplement their income by providing private tuition, in some cases even pressuring students to attend. Coaching centres, exploiting the absence of an effective regulatory mechanism, have proliferated nationwide, particularly before public examinations. Educationists describe this as a multi-dimensional problem, rooted in low teacher salary, unfilled positions, a shortage of subject-specific instructors and limited classroom periods, which prevent schools from adequately covering syllabuses. Past government directives, including the 2012 circular and a High Court verdict in 2019, have sought to prevent teachers from running coaching business in their own institutions while permitting limited external tuition with institutional approval. Yet, enforcement remains weak. Experts emphasise that the phenomenon reflects structural deficiencies rather than individual failing: schools fail to fill teaching gaps, weak students miss essential support and guardians feel compelled to seek coaching. The financial strain is further exacerbated by irregular and inadequate salaries. Meanwhile, research shows that household education expenditure has surged, driven largely by the reliance on coaching and guidebooks.

The unchecked rise of coaching centres has begun to erode the foundation of formal education system, producing a parallel 'shadow education' economy that undermines learning rather than enhancing it. Scholars warn that the coaching-centric culture prioritises examination success over genuine understanding, driving rote memorisation at the expense of critical thinking, creativity and problem-solving skills essential for the 21st century. This trend has generated what critics term 'certificate-rich but knowledge-poor' graduates, ill-equipped to navigate an increasingly complex labour market, while fomenting an ethos in which grades are valued above comprehension. Moreover, the financial burden of coaching fees and guidebooks has intensified social inequality, with wealthy families being able to secure multiple tutors while poor students are left at a disadvantage, further entrenching class divides in educational attainment. Students' mental health and well-being also suffer as relentless coaching pressure erodes time for rest, play and holistic development. The root causes are structural: inadequate teacher deployment, insufficient classroom time and low pay. A weak enforcement of the bans has also contributed to the system's drift towards private tuition. Meaningful reform should, therefore, focus on strengthening education, by filling in teaching vacancies, raising teacher remuneration, improving classroom quality and ensuring robust oversight of coaching institutions so that classroom learning again becomes the primary vehicle for knowledge and equity.

The government should act decisively to reclaim classrooms as the primary arena of learning. Teacher shortage, inadequate salary and unchecked coaching cannot be ignored any longer. Without structural reforms by filling in vacancies, ensuring a fair pay and strictly enforcing bans on coaching, the cycle of inequality, rote learning and undue pressure on students will

persist.