



DAILY EDITORIAL ANALYSIS

TOPIC

**THE STARK REALITY OF
EDUCATIONAL COSTS IN INDIA**

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Context

- The **NSS 80th Round (2025)** findings highlight a troubling trend in India's basic schooling landscape: despite constitutional guarantees the **Right to Free and Compulsory Education for all children aged 6 to 14 years** under **Article 21A** and **policy ambitions (National Education Policy 2020)**, household expenditure on education is rising, and access is becoming increasingly unequal due to growing reliance on private schools and coaching.

Key Findings from the NSS 80th Round Survey

- Enrolment Trends (Public vs. Private Education):** At the national level, enrolment remains **divided between government and private schools**:
 - ♦ **55.9%** in government schools;
 - ♦ **11.3%** in private aided schools;
 - ♦ **31.9%** in private unaided schools;
- Urban–Rural Divide:**
 - ♦ **Urban areas:** 51.4% of students attend private schools.
 - ♦ **Rural areas:** Only 24.3% attend private schools.
 - The **gender gap** in private school enrolment is modest, **34% of boys** versus **29.5% of girls**.
- Rising Private Enrolment Over Time:** Private enrolment has increased at all education levels, both in rural and urban areas, compared with the **75th NSS Round (2017–18)**.
 - ♦ It underscores a **growing preference for private education** — often associated with better perceived quality but higher costs.
- Cost of Education:**
 - ♦ **Rural government schools:** 25.3% of students pay fees.
 - ♦ **Urban government schools:** 34.7% pay fees.
 - In contrast, **98% of private school students**, rural or urban, pay course fees.
- In comparison with **Household Consumption Expenditure (HCES 2023–24)**:
 - ♦ **Pre-primary private school costs** equal the **monthly income of the poorest 5%** of households.
 - ♦ **Higher secondary private school costs** match the **income of households in the third income decile**.
 - It clearly demonstrates that **education has become a heavy financial burden**, even at the basic level.
- Private Coaching: Hidden Cost of Learning:**
 - ♦ **Incidence of Private Tutoring:** Private tuition, now a parallel education system, is widely prevalent:
 - **Rural areas:** 25.5% of children take private coaching.
 - **Urban areas:** 30.7% of children do so.
 - ♦ Participation increases with grade level, from around **10–13% at pre-primary** to **over 40% at higher secondary**.
- Expenditure on Private Coaching:** The **average annual cost** of private coaching is ₹7,066 in rural and ₹13,026 in urban areas, which add significantly to the already high cost of schooling.

Socio-Economic Correlates of Private Tutoring

- Cost Burden and Inequality:** 80th Round of NSS shows that private school students pay up to 9 times more than those in government schools.

- ♦ Urban households, especially in states like Telangana and Delhi, spend significantly more on education, including tuition, transport, and digital devices.
- ♦ The financial burden is disproportionately high for lower-income families, who often cut back on essentials to afford private schooling or coaching.
- **Policy Blind Spots:** There is limited regulation or oversight of the coaching industry, while the **NEP (2020)** acknowledges the issue of private tutoring.
 - ♦ The lack of affordable, high-quality public education options pushes families toward private alternatives, reinforcing socio-economic divides.
- **Parental Aspirations and Social Mobility:** Families with **higher household income, parental education, and urban residence** view coaching as an **investment in academic success** and **social prestige**.
 - ♦ Many private school teachers are **underpaid and underqualified** despite high private school fees, compelling parents to spend even more on private tutoring.
- **Inequality and the Decline of Public Schooling:** **Free education** is a constitutional right. But, **costly private education** is increasingly the norm, **perpetuating inequality**.
 - ♦ Affluent families can afford private schools and coaching, poorer families rely on **underfunded public schools**, leading to divergent learning outcomes.

Ongoing Efforts to Improve Public Schooling in India

- **Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan (2018):** Integrates three earlier schemes: Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA), and Teacher Education (TE).
 - ♦ It aims to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education from pre-primary to Class XII.
- **PM SHRI Schools (2022):** To develop over 14,500 model schools across India. It focuses on:
 - ♦ Modern infrastructure with smart classrooms;
 - ♦ Holistic, inquiry-based pedagogy aligned with NEP 2020;
 - ♦ Emphasis on environmental sustainability and experiential learning;
- **National Digital Education Architecture (NDEAR):** It aims to create a unified digital infrastructure for education. It includes:
 - ♦ DIKSHA platform for e-content and teacher training;
 - ♦ UDISE+ for real-time school data;
 - ♦ Digital learning resources in regional languages;
- **Mid-Day Meal Scheme (PM POSHAN):** It aims to improve nutritional status and school attendance.
 - ♦ Over 11 crore children in government and government-aided schools.
 - ♦ Inclusion of pre-primary children and fortified food in some states.
- **Bharatiya Bhasha Pustak Scheme (Union Budget 2025–26):** It aims to provide digital-format textbooks in Indian languages to enhance comprehension and accessibility.

Way Forward: Strengthening Publicly Funded Schools

- Addressing inequities requires urgent systemic reforms. Strengthening **public education** is crucial to ensure that **education remains a right, not a privilege**.
 - ♦ **The Journal of Development Studies (2024)** finds that **private tuition is negatively associated with school quality**, students in better schools depend less on tutoring.
- Improving **teaching standards, infrastructure, and accountability** in government schools can reduce dependence on private tuition and restore public confidence in free education.

Conclusion

- India's constitutional vision of free and universal education remains far from reality.
 - ♦ **Education is becoming one of the largest household expenditures** for many Indian families with rising private school enrolment, high tuition costs, and increasing reliance on private coaching.
- India needs to urgently **revitalize public schooling**, ensure equitable funding, and uphold the constitutional promise of '**education for all**' to realize the NEP 2020 goal of **universal education by 2030**.

Daily Mains Practice Question

[Q] Critically examine the socio-economic implications of rising educational costs in India. How do these costs affect access, equity, and the broader goals of the National Education Policy 2020?

Source: TH

