



Stakeholder Perspectives To The Ministry Of Education's Age Restrictions On Coaching Institutes: Perspectives From Parents, Teachers, And Students

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Abstract

India's unregulated private coaching industry has grown into a multibillion-dollar sector, raising serious concerns about student welfare, developmental appropriateness, and educational equity. In response, the Ministry of Education issued comprehensive guidelines that include, most notably, an age restriction prohibiting coaching enrolment of students below 16 years of age. This mixed-methods study investigates the perspectives of parents, teachers, and students toward these guidelines, with particular emphasis on the age restriction provision, using stratified random sampling at Aiswaneswara Bidyapitha School in Astaranga Block, Puri District, Odisha. Data were collected from 57 students (Classes 8–10), 30 teachers, and 57 parents through structured questionnaires supplemented by informal interviews. Key findings reveal that 89% of parents were aware of the guidelines, 58% supported the age restriction, and 77% reported their children experienced coaching-related stress. All 30 teachers demonstrated complete policy awareness, yet 63% enrolled their own children in coaching—indicating a systemic confidence gap in school-only preparation. Students showed long-term dependency on coaching (72% attending for over two years), with personalized attention cited as the primary draw. The study highlights the need for strengthened school teaching, school-based mental health support, ethical marketing regulation, and tiered enforcement strategies to translate policy intent into equitable educational practice.

Keywords: coaching institutes, age restriction, Ministry of Education guidelines, stakeholder perspectives, student well-being, private coaching regulation

1. Introduction

Over the past three decades, India's schools and universities have become increasingly competitive. As the number of students aspiring to join prestigious institutions has grown far faster than the available seats, parents have looked for every possible advantage to help their children succeed. This pressure has turned private coaching into one of the fastest-growing industries in the country. What began as modest tutorial services has transformed into a vast network of coaching centres ranging from small neighbourhood classes to enormous commercial operations, many of which run almost as a parallel schooling system alongside formal education. Cities like Kota in Rajasthan have become synonymous with this

phenomenon, drawing tens of thousands of students from across the country who relocate there specifically to prepare for engineering and medical entrance examinations.

The scale of the industry is hard to ignore. The coaching sector is estimated to be growing at around 15% a year and is now worth billions of rupees (ASSOCHAM, 2022). Yet for most of its existence, it has operated without any meaningful regulatory framework. There are no uniform standards for classroom safety, teacher qualifications, fee transparency, or the minimum age at which students can be enrolled. This absence of rules has allowed the sector to expand in ways that are not always in students' best interests.

Several troubling patterns have emerged as a result. Coaching institutes have been pushing the entry age lower and lower, with some centres now accepting children as young as eight or nine years old (Agarwal & Nanda, 2020). A catastrophic fire at a coaching centre in Surat in 2019 killed 22 young students and exposed the dangerous state of safety infrastructure in many such buildings. Between 2018 and 2023, media reports and data from the National Crime Records Bureau (2023) documented more than a hundred student suicides attributed to the pressures of competitive coaching. Misleading advertisements routinely promise parents that enrolment will guarantee high ranks or top marks. And the teaching model used by many centres—heavy on memorisation and formula drilling—crowds out the kind of thinking and creativity that education is ultimately meant to nurture.

In response, the Ministry of Education issued comprehensive guidelines for regulating coaching institutes, with a cornerstone provision prohibiting enrolment of students below 16 years of age. Aligned with the holistic development ethos of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, these guidelines represent a significant attempt to introduce minimum standards for safety, faculty qualifications, marketing ethics, mental health support, and infrastructure. However, the effectiveness of any policy depends on the awareness, attitudes, and compliance behaviours of those most directly affected—students, parents, and teachers.

This study investigates stakeholder perspectives on these guidelines at Aiswaneswara Bidyapitha School in Astaranga Block, Puri District, Odisha—a semi-rural setting largely unrepresented in existing research, which has disproportionately focused on urban coaching hubs. Understanding how stakeholders in such contexts perceive the guidelines is essential for designing context-sensitive implementation and support strategies.

2. Review of Related Literature

2.1 The Coaching Phenomenon in India

Smith (2003) established the foundational importance of supplementary education in the Asia-Pacific region, noting that homework and coaching serve as vital complements to classroom learning in societies where examination performance is tied to students' life chances and social mobility. The study identified coaching as largely unregulated across Asian countries, even as it grew in educational significance.

Agarwal and Nanda (2020) documented the historical evolution of coaching institutes in India from small tutorial services to large commercial enterprises, noting the disconcerting downward trend in admission age, with some institutes accepting students as young as 8–9 years of age. Their analysis highlighted growing policymaker concern about the developmental appropriateness of such early enrolment and traced the policy discussions that eventually culminated in the Ministry of Education's age restriction guidelines.

2.2 Developmental Considerations and Age-Appropriate Learning

Chakrabarty and Ghosh (2022) conducted a comprehensive review of developmental psychology literature applied to Indian educational contexts, synthesising 45 studies. Their analysis demonstrated that children below 14 years of age typically lack the cognitive and emotional maturation required for high-pressure competitive coaching, and documented that premature coaching exposure frequently results in decreased intrinsic motivation, heightened performance anxiety, and reduced creativity. Sharma et al. (2021) similarly found significantly higher rates of depression and anxiety among younger students (15–16 years) in coaching programmes compared to older students (17–18 years), using validated screening instruments (PHQ-9 and GAD-7) across 400 students, suggesting developmental vulnerability to early coaching exposure.

2.3 Parental Perspectives and Decision-Making

Deb, Strodl, and Sun (2015) surveyed 190 high school students in Kolkata and found that 63.5% reported academic stress due to pressure, with parental expectations identified as a key contributing factor. The study established a significant positive correlation between parental pressure and psychiatric problems, providing important context for understanding why parental attitudes toward age restrictions tend to be complex and sometimes contradictory.

Singh and Kapoor (2022) conducted focus groups with 127 parents across socioeconomic strata in Maharashtra, finding that 58% acknowledged the developmental benefits of age-appropriate enrolment while 67% simultaneously feared their children would 'fall behind' competitively. Goswami and Bhandari (2022) identified dominant parental narratives justifying early enrolment—including 'securing the child's future' and 'developing a competitive edge'—and noted that higher-income families demonstrated awareness of developmental concerns yet often prioritised competitive advantage, while lower-income families tended to view early coaching as a pathway to social mobility.

2.4 Teacher and Institutional Perspectives

Reddy and Sharma (2022) surveyed 78 coaching institute owners and 156 instructors across major coaching hubs. Their research found that 73% of institute owners opposed age restrictions primarily for economic reasons, reporting anticipated revenue losses of 15–30%. However, instructor perspectives were more nuanced: 52% supported age-appropriate admissions despite economic concerns, citing pedagogical challenges and concerns about younger students' coping capacities. Anand (2018) highlighted the need for a pro-social, enabling school environment that promotes mental well-being, with attention to the particular vulnerabilities of children from lower socioeconomic backgrounds exposed to intense competitive pressure.

2.5 Policy Implementation and Educational Equity

Mehta et al. (2022) evaluated the initial rollout of age restriction guidelines across five major Indian cities using a mixed-methods design, finding substantial variation in compliance—ranging from 87% in Delhi to 42% in tier-2 cities. Key implementation challenges included limited enforcement capacity, jurisdictional ambiguity between central and state authorities, and the proliferation of unregistered coaching centres. Sharma and Jain (2022) identified that states with integrated implementation strategies (clear regulatory frameworks, dedicated enforcement staff, stakeholder education campaigns) achieved compliance rates above 70%, while fragmented approaches yielded only 35–40%.

Kapur (2020) documented sharp socioeconomic stratification in coaching access using national household survey data: highest-income-quintile families were seven times more likely to enrol children in coaching than lowest-quintile families. Mishra and Sen (2022) found that age restrictions had differential effects

across socioeconomic lines: upper-middle-class families could circumvent restrictions through private tutoring and online platforms, while the restrictions more effectively regulated coaching access for lower-income families, potentially exacerbating educational disparities if complementary school-strengthening policies are absent.

2.6 International Comparative Perspectives

Park and Lee (2021) provided a 15-year longitudinal evaluation of South Korea's hagwon regulations, including age restrictions and operating hour limitations. Their analysis found that initial stakeholder resistance gave way to broader acceptance as the system stabilised, and that regulations ultimately contributed to more developmentally appropriate educational sequences without sacrificing educational quality. Wong and Zhang (2022) compared supplementary education regulations across five Asian educational systems and identified that successful frameworks consistently combined clear age guidelines with quality standards, teacher certification requirements, and monitoring mechanisms—insights highly relevant to India's evolving regulatory landscape.

2.7 Research Gap

While the existing literature addresses stakeholder perspectives in urban and metropolitan contexts, research examining how communities in semi-rural Odisha—or comparable settings—perceive and respond to coaching regulation is conspicuously absent. This study addresses that gap by situating inquiry within Aiswanawara Bidyapitha School, Puri District, where the interplay of low coaching fees, limited school resources, and high parental aspirations creates a distinctive policy context.

3. Research Questions and Objectives

3.1 Research Questions

1. What is the prevailing coaching participation pattern among the students?
2. What are parents', teachers', and students' attitudes towards the age restriction guidelines for private coaching institutions?
3. How do stakeholders perceive the impact of age restriction guidelines on students' learning outcomes?
4. What challenges and benefits arise from implementing age restrictions?

3.2 Objectives

1. To examine the prevailing coaching participation pattern among the students.
2. To analyse the attitudes of parents, teachers, and students towards the age restriction guidelines for private coaching institutions.
3. To investigate stakeholders' perceptions regarding the impact of age restriction guidelines on students' learning outcomes.
4. To identify the challenges and benefits associated with the implementation of age restriction guidelines in private coaching institutions.

4. Methodology

4.1 Research Design

The study employed a mixed-methods survey design, integrating quantitative analysis of structured questionnaire responses with qualitative insights drawn from informal interviews. This concurrent design enabled triangulation of perspectives across three stakeholder groups—students, parents, and teachers—yielding both statistical patterns and contextual understanding of attitudes toward the Ministry of Education’s guidelines.

4.2 Study Setting

The study was conducted at Aiswaneswara Bidyapitha School, located in Astaranga Block, Puri District, Odisha—a secondary school serving students from semi-rural and rural households. The setting was chosen because it represents an under-studied demographic: students in the 8th–10th grade cohort who fall within the age range directly targeted by the age restriction provision (below 16 years), and whose families are predominantly middle- and lower-middle-income.

4.3 Population and Sample

The study population comprised all students, teachers, and parents associated with the selected school. A stratified random sampling technique was employed to ensure proportional representation across all three stakeholder groups. Table 1 presents the sample composition.

Table 1: Sample Composition by Stakeholder Group

Stakeholder Group	Sample Size (n)	Sampling Criteria
Students	57	Random selection from Classes 8, 9, and 10; equal gender representation
Teachers	30	All secondary school teachers at the school; full faculty coverage
Parents	57	Parents of students enrolled in private coaching; identified via school records
Total	144	Stratified sample ensuring representation across all groups

4.4 Tools used for Data Collection

Three separate self-developed structured questionnaires were designed—one per stakeholder group—reflecting their distinct roles and knowledge bases. Each instrument addressed: (a) current coaching participation patterns; (b) awareness of the Ministry’s guidelines; (c) attitudes toward the age restriction provision; and (d) perceived impacts on student well-being, academic performance, and extracurricular participation. Items were primarily close-ended on a five-point Likert scale to facilitate quantitative comparison, with supplementary open-ended questions capturing qualitative depth. Selected teachers and parents additionally participated in brief informal interviews to elaborate on survey responses.

4.5 Procedure and Ethical Considerations

The researcher personally visited the school to administer questionnaires, having first obtained formal permission from school authorities. Students completed questionnaires in supervised classroom sessions; teachers responded individually; parents were reached during parent-teacher meetings and scheduled school visits. Participation was fully voluntary, anonymity was maintained throughout, and data were used solely for academic purposes.

5. Findings and Analysis

5.1 Parental Perspectives

5.1.1 Coaching Participation Patterns

A substantial majority of parents (72%, n=41) reported their children had been attending coaching for more than two years, with a further 16% (n=9) reporting one to two years' attendance. All 57 parents (100%) reported daily coaching attendance. Together, these figures confirm that coaching is not a peripheral supplement but is deeply integrated into students' daily routines—functioning, in practical terms, as a second schooling system.

The primary motivation for enrolment was grade improvement (63%), followed by the desire for personalised attention (18%) and entrance examination preparation (16%). Notably, no parent cited enhancing subject-matter understanding or managing specific learning difficulties—suggesting coaching is perceived as a performance-enhancement tool rather than a remediation resource. The monthly fee burden was low for most families: 93% paid less than ₹1,000 per month, and 96% spent less than 5% of household income on coaching. Despite this affordability, 70% reported that financial constraints had influenced enrolment decisions, indicating that even low-cost coaching creates meaningful trade-offs for middle-income households.

Large-group coaching was the modal format (46%), though demand for small-group and one-to-one instruction was substantial (37% and 12%, respectively). The dominant influence on provider selection was advertising (79%), with peer recommendations (4%) and proximity (5%) playing comparatively minor roles—highlighting the outsized influence of marketing in an unregulated environment.

5.1.2 Awareness of and Attitudes toward the Age Restriction Guidelines

Of the 57 parents surveyed, 89% (n=51) were aware of the Ministry's age restriction policy. Media—including television, newspapers, and online articles—was the dominant information source (35%), followed by informal peer networks and social media (45% 'other' sources). Schools played a minimal role in dissemination (6%), and coaching centres played only a slightly larger one (14%), likely reflecting commercial disincentives to publicise restrictions on their own enrolment.

On a five-point Likert scale, 58% of parents agreed or strongly agreed with the age restriction provision, 25% were neutral, and 18% disagreed or strongly disagreed. Supporters cited concerns about children's stress, mental health, and the belief that foundational schooling should suffice. Opponents expressed fear of competitive disadvantage—a 'first-mover disadvantage' concern previously documented by Singh and Kapoor (2022).

5.1.3 Impact on Student Well-Being

A substantial majority of parents (77%) reported that their children experienced coaching-related stress—with 12% reporting frequent stress and 65% reporting occasional stress. Additionally, 56% noted that coaching had significantly reduced participation in extracurricular activities and social engagement, a concern aligned with the NEP 2020's emphasis on holistic development. Table 2 summarises parental attitude data.

Table 2: Parental Attitudes toward the Age Restriction Guideline (n=57)

Variable	n (%)	Key Interpretation
Aware of guideline	51 (89%)	High awareness; media is primary source
Supports age restriction	33 (58%)	Majority support; concern about child stress
Neutral toward guideline	14 (25%)	Waiting to assess policy effects
Opposes age restriction	10 (18%)	Fears competitive disadvantage
Child experiences stress from coaching	44 (77%)	Coaching is a consistent stressor
Coaching impacts extracurriculars	32 (56%)	Coaching crowds out social & co-curricular life
Advertising influenced provider choice	45 (79%)	Marketing dominates parental decision-making

5.2 Teacher Perspectives

5.2.1 Awareness and Classroom Practice

All 30 teachers (100%) were aware of the Ministry's age restriction guideline—a substantially higher awareness rate than among parents (89%)—likely due to school circulars and professional communication channels. This near-universal awareness confirms that policy dissemination through institutional pathways is effective for educators.

Yet teacher behaviour reveals a revealing contradiction: 63% sent their own children to coaching institutes, and a further 30% employed private tutors for their children. Only 7% relied on self-teaching. This near-universal dependence on external coaching among educators is striking. It implies that teachers' confidence in school-only preparation is systemically low—even when they simultaneously affirm (77%) that school teaching is 'sufficient.' This disconnect suggests a difference between normative belief and practical risk-management behaviour.

5.2.2 Classroom Conditions and Non-Teaching Burdens

The data reveal structural constraints that help explain coaching dependency. Pupil-teacher ratios of 20:1 to 30:1 were reported by 83% of teachers; 17% faced ratios above 30:1. Despite this, 70% of teachers acknowledged an inability to provide meaningful personalised attention in classrooms—a gap that coaching directly addresses. Administrative and non-teaching burdens affected 83% of teachers, though 77% maintained they did not compromise lesson delivery. The pattern that emerges is one of adequate syllabus coverage without adequate individualised support—explaining why coaching's personalised format is so valued by both students (84% report receiving personalised attention in coaching) and parents (77% cite personalised attention as a primary selection criterion).

5.2.3 Views on Coaching Necessity

Teachers were divided on whether private coaching is necessary: 57% considered it essential, while 43% believed school teaching should suffice. This near-even split, combined with teachers' own coaching dependency for their children, suggests that professional judgement about the adequacy of school education and personal risk-calculation as parents produce fundamentally different conclusions.

5.3 Student Perspectives

The student data (n=57, Classes 8–10) echo and reinforce the parental findings. Long-term coaching dependency is pronounced: 72% had attended coaching for over two years. The breadth of coaching is notable: 63% received coaching across all subjects, implying that coaching functions as a near-complete parallel curriculum rather than targeted supplementation.

Personalized attention was the most consistently valued feature: 84% of students reported receiving it in coaching—compared to only 30% of teachers who said they could provide it in classrooms. Comfort with coaching teachers (77%) and regular feedback (88%) also scored highly, suggesting that coaching centres' pedagogical environment is perceived as more responsive than formal schooling. Concerningly, 75% found coaching session durations too short—indicating demand for even more intensive coaching, and possibly reflecting anxiety-driven over-reliance on external instruction.

Time management data revealed the extent of coaching-school competition for student attention: 44% prioritised coaching over school work, while only 23% focused primarily on school. This rebalancing of educational priority is precisely the developmental concern underlying the Ministry's age restriction. Table 3 summarises cross-stakeholder findings.

Table 3: Cross-Stakeholder Comparative Findings on Key Themes

Theme	Parents	Teachers	Students
Policy Awareness	89% aware	100% aware	Not directly assessed
Support for age restriction	58% supportive	Divided (57% view coaching as necessary)	Majority rely on coaching
Personalised attention	77% cite it as key reason	70% cannot provide it in schools	84% receive it in coaching
Stress and well-being	77% report child stress	Observe stress but value academic benefit	44% prioritise coaching over school

6. Discussion

The findings converge to paint a coherent picture: coaching institutes have become structurally embedded in students' educational routines in this semi-rural context, filling a gap—particularly in personalised attention—that formal schooling is structurally constrained from filling. This embeddedness helps explain why majority support for the age restriction guideline (58% of parents) coexists with widespread continued coaching enrolment: stakeholders may approve of the policy in principle while finding it practically infeasible to comply with in the absence of credible school-based alternatives.

The contrast between teachers' professional confidence in school teaching (77% say it is sufficient) and their personal behaviour as parents (93% seek external coaching for their own children) is perhaps the most diagnostically significant finding. It resonates with Reddy and Sharma's (2022) observation of instructor ambivalence, and with the broader literature on the 'coaching culture' as a self-reinforcing social norm (Goswami & Bhandari, 2022; Singh & Kapoor, 2022). Simply mandating age restrictions, without addressing the underlying confidence gap and structural deficiencies in school teaching, risks driving coaching underground or displacing it into less regulated private tutoring formats—an outcome documented by Mishra and Sen (2022) in their analysis of differential policy impact across socioeconomic groups.

The finding that advertising dominates provider selection (79%) underscores the policy relevance of the Ministry's marketing ethics provisions. In an environment where 93% of coaching is low-cost (under ₹1,000/month), price is not the primary differentiator; perceived quality communicated through marketing is. This makes the guideline's prohibition on misleading claims and rank guarantees particularly important for protecting lower-income families who may be most susceptible to aspirational marketing.

The 77% parental report of child coaching-related stress, combined with 56% reporting reduced extracurricular participation, provides direct empirical support for the age restriction's developmental rationale. The literature on developmental vulnerability at younger ages (Chakrabarty & Ghosh, 2022; Sharma et al., 2021; Deb, Strodl & Sun, 2015) consistently shows that intensive academic pressure during formative years carries mental health costs that may outweigh short-term performance gains.

The contextual comparison with South Korea's hagwon regulatory experience (Park & Lee, 2021) is instructive: initial resistance gave way to acceptance as the system stabilised and schools strengthened. The Indian policy trajectory suggests a similar evolution may be possible, but only if school-strengthening measures—smaller class sizes, reduced non-teaching burdens on teachers, curriculum alignment with competitive examination requirements—are implemented in parallel with the restriction itself.

7. Educational Implications and Recommendations

The findings yield several actionable implications for policy and practice.

Strengthening School Teaching Quality: The 70% of teachers who acknowledge inability to provide personalised classroom attention, combined with 83% reporting non-teaching burdens, indicates that reducing administrative loads and lowering pupil-teacher ratios are necessary preconditions for school-based alternatives to coaching to be credible. Targeted professional development focused on differentiated instruction and formative assessment could partially address this gap.

Communication and Dissemination Strategies: The 11% of parents unaware of the guidelines, and the minimal role of schools in dissemination (6%), suggests that schools must become active communicators of education policy rather than passive intermediaries. Structured parent engagement sessions and school-led awareness campaigns would improve both awareness and implementation fidelity.

Mental Health Infrastructure: The 77% parental report of coaching-related stress provides direct justification for the Ministry's requirement that registered coaching centres maintain counselling systems. Schools should develop parallel psychological support mechanisms—counselling referral pathways, stress management programmes, and teacher training in recognising academic distress—consistent with NEP 2020's emphasis on student well-being.

Tiered Regulatory Approach: The predominantly low-cost coaching environment (93% below ₹1,000/month) in this setting is qualitatively different from the high-fee metropolitan coaching industry around which much regulation is designed. Implementation strategies should be context-sensitive, recognising that in semi-rural settings, enforcement capacity may be limited and alternatives to coaching may be scarce.

Addressing the Competitive Anxiety Cycle: The 18% of parents who oppose age restrictions—primarily due to fear of competitive disadvantage—will not be persuaded by policy mandate alone. Creating credible school-based enrichment programmes and communicating evidence that delayed coaching entry does not harm examination outcomes (Gupta & Sharma, 2023) may shift this dynamic over time.

Marketing Ethics Enforcement: Given the 79% reliance on advertising in provider selection, the guideline's marketing ethics provisions are particularly important in this context. Consumer education initiatives, objective quality rating systems published by education departments, and publicised enforcement of misleading claims would collectively improve the information environment for parental decision-making.

8. Conclusion

This study reveals that the Ministry of Education's age restriction guidelines for coaching institutes are broadly known (89% parental awareness; 100% teacher awareness) and enjoy majority parental support (58%), yet coexist with deeply entrenched coaching dependency driven by structural deficiencies in school-based personalised instruction, competitive parental anxieties, and a self-reinforcing coaching culture. The data from this semi-rural Odisha setting—where coaching is low-cost, widespread, and long-term—demonstrate that age restrictions alone are unlikely to achieve their developmental objectives without parallel investments in school teaching quality, teacher workload management, mental health infrastructure, and parent and community engagement.

The findings reinforce the developmental rationale behind the guidelines: 77% of students experience coaching-related stress, 56% experience reduced extracurricular participation, and 44% already prioritise coaching over school—patterns that, if uncorrected, risk producing the narrowly exam-focused, intrinsically unmotivated learners that the NEP 2020 seeks to move away from. The study contributes to a small but growing body of evidence from non-metropolitan India on coaching regulation, and its findings should inform both state-level implementation strategies and the design of complementary school-strengthening policies.

9. Limitations and Directions for Future Research

This study is delimited to a single school in Astaranga Block, Puri District, during the 2024–2025 academic year, and findings should be interpreted accordingly. The sample of 144 respondents, while adequate for the study's scope, precludes broad generalisation. Several fruitful directions for further research emerge from the findings: longitudinal studies tracking student academic performance and psychological well-being before and after guideline implementation; comparative studies across urban, semi-urban, and rural settings within Odisha and across states; and experimental evaluation of school-based interventions designed to reduce coaching dependency. Research on the effectiveness of specific implementation strategies—including grievance redressal mechanisms and incentive structures for compliant institutes—would further strengthen the evidence base.

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