



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CREATIVE RESEARCH THOUGHTS (IJCRT)

An International Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

Trends in Joining Coaching Centers for Entrance Examinations: Reasons and Choices

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Abstract

This study investigates the factors influencing students' decisions to join coaching centers for entrance examinations, with particular emphasis on gender-based differences. Grounded in a review of thirty-four peer-reviewed and industry studies on private coaching and shadow education in India, the research examines six decision dimensions: perception of coaching, parental influence, peer influence, preference for coaching versus self-study, online versus offline mode preference, and financial considerations. Findings from a gender-disaggregated survey indicate that female students are more influenced by parental expectations and financial constraints, whereas male students demonstrate relatively greater autonomy in decision-making. Both groups show a preference for coaching over self-study, although a significant proportion still value independent preparation. Additionally, the increasing preference for online coaching, especially among female students, highlights a shift toward flexible and accessible learning models. The study concludes with theoretical and practical implications for coaching providers, parents, and policymakers.

Keywords: Coaching centers, Entrance Examination, Educational decision-making, Shadow education

I. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the demand for coaching centers has increased significantly, particularly in countries such as India, where the private test-preparation and shadow-education industry has become one of the fastest-growing segments of the education sector (Kishore & Sarin, 2022). This growing reliance on coaching institutions raises critical questions about the changing nature of education and the reasons students increasingly prefer coaching over self-study or formal schooling. Understanding these motivations is essential for educators, policymakers, and coaching providers, as it helps in designing more effective and inclusive educational strategies (Sharma, Mehra & Ganaie, 2022).

Coaching centers, often referred to as tutorials, private tuitions, or 'shadow education', have become a prominent feature of the contemporary educational landscape. They offer structured guidance, exam-oriented preparation, and access to specialized study materials that are often not readily available in traditional classroom settings (Bharucha, 2018), and institutes have increasingly adopted formal quality-management frameworks to sustain this structured advantage under competitive pressure (Gokak, Mehendale & Bhāle, 2023). As a result, these institutions are increasingly viewed as essential support systems for students preparing for highly competitive entrance examinations such as engineering and medical tests. Their role has expanded beyond mere academic assistance to becoming a parallel system of education that complements, and in some cases competes with, formal schooling (Narmada Devi et al., 2024).

The rapid expansion of coaching centers can also be attributed to systemic challenges within formal education, including large class sizes, limited individual attention, and curriculum constraints (Jha, 2024a). Coaching institutions attempt to address these gaps by providing personalized learning environments, flexible schedules, and targeted instruction. Additionally, advancements in digital technology have facilitated the growth of online coaching platforms, making educational resources more accessible and affordable to a wider population, a trend that accelerated sharply following the COVID-19 pandemic (Agarwal, Bansal, Gupta & Khurana, 2021; Suneja & Bagai, 2021).

Socio-cultural and economic factors also play a significant role in shaping students' decisions to enroll in coaching centers. Parental expectations, financial investment, and aspirations for upward mobility significantly shape students' decisions, especially in competitive academic environments (Majilla, 2025; Kariya, Bhavé, Pradeep, Bhavé & Kulkarni, 2026). National-level survey evidence further shows that coaching expenditure can account for anywhere between 15 and 50 percent of a household's total education spending, underscoring its growing weight within family budgets and highlighting its importance within the education sector (Singh & Singh, 2025; Kumar & Chowdhury, 2021), with rural households and rural-oriented demand shaped by an additional layer of household, school, and community-level factors specific to non-urban contexts (Agrawal, Gupta & Mondal, 2024). Caste and religious background further condition this investment: evidence from West Bengal shows that Scheduled Caste households invest markedly less in private coaching than other social groups, reflecting cultural as much as purely financial constraints (Gangopadhyay & Sarkar, 2014). Consequently, coaching centers have emerged as a powerful alternative educational framework, competing for students' time, attention, and financial investment.

Given this context, it becomes crucial to examine the underlying reasons behind students' choices and preferences regarding coaching centers. Such an analysis not only provides insights into student behavior but also contributes to ongoing discussions about equity, accessibility, and the future direction of education systems.

Research Question

What are the reasons behind joining a coaching center for entrance examination?

Literature Review

Existing literature on coaching centers and shadow education has predominantly focused on their economic scale, socio-demographic determinants, and equity implications, drawing largely on large national datasets. Studies emphasize that coaching institutions provide structured learning environments, systematic guidance, and exam-oriented preparation strategies that are not always available through formal schooling (Bharucha, 2018; Sharma, G.K., 2024), while national survey-based research shows that coaching participation and expenditure are strongly shaped by household income, caste, region, and urban residence (Singh & Singh, 2025; Kumar & Chowdhury, 2021; Choudhury, Gill & Kumar, 2024). This uneven access is compounded by a broader shift toward privatised supplementary education, which several scholars argue predominantly benefits already-affluent groups while excluding underprivileged and rural populations from its advantages (Kaur & Sharma, 2025), and by a growing critique that coaching has shifted from a remedial tool into a marker of academic 'prestige', deepening rather than narrowing existing educational inequalities (Sharma, H., 2019).

A distinct body of work documents gender bias in educational investment, showing a persistent pro-male bias in both access to and expenditure on private coaching and private schooling (Azam, 2016; Choudhury, Kumar & Gill, 2023; Sahoo, 2017; Choudhury, Kumar & Gill, 2025; Majilla, 2025). A third strand, accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, examines the shift toward online and EdTech-based learning, alongside evidence of a digital gender divide that constrains girls' access to online education (Agarwal et al., 2021; Suneja & Bagai, 2021; Mathrani, Sarvesh & Mathrani, 2020; Bala & Singhal, 2018). Table 1 summarizes the thirty-four sources consulted for this review, along with their focus, key findings, and relevance to the present study's research question.

S.No.	Author(s) & Year	Focus of Study	Key Findings	Relevance to the Present Study
1	Singh & Singh (2025)	Household spending on shadow education	Private coaching is concentrated among urban, affluent, upper-caste households; coaching costs equal 15.2% of total education spend, straining rural households.	Anchors the financial-consideration dimension and highlights urban-rural disparity in coaching uptake.
2	Sharma, Mehra & Ganaie (2022)	Growth of coaching as a business	Coaching has grown from small tuition centres into large, multi-branch enterprises across metros and small towns.	Provides background on the scale of coaching expansion referenced in the study's introduction.
3	Kishore & Sarin (2022)	Indian test-preparation industry	Rapid growth of the coaching industry perpetuates existing social inequalities, with limited state regulation.	Frames coaching as embedded in competitive, high-stakes exam culture, supporting the study's rationale.
4	Azam (2016)	Incidence and cost of private tutoring	Urban, private-school and higher-income students are more likely to take tutoring; demand is inelastic; evidence of pro-male bias in tutoring decisions.	Direct national-level evidence of gender bias in tutoring decisions, core to the study's gender comparison.
5	Choudhury, Gill & Kumar (2024)	Determinants of tutoring demand, secondary level	About 29% of secondary students take private tutoring; disadvantaged groups are under-represented; science/commerce streams show higher demand.	Empirical determinants of who joins coaching, relevant to the study's socio-economic framing.
6	Sharma, G.K. (2024)	Growth and implications of tutoring	Competitive exams, mobility aspirations, and dissatisfaction with public schooling drive demand; financial burden and gender/caste inequities persist.	Maps closely onto several RQ dimensions: motivation, financial cost, and equity.
7	Kumar & Chowdhury (2021)	Participation and determinants of shadow education	Socioeconomic status, household head's education, and urban residence are significant determinants; tutoring costs 40-50% of household education spend.	Strong empirical anchor for the financial-consideration dimension of the RQ.
8	Kaur & Sharma (2025)	Shadow education amid privatisation	Shadow education predominantly serves affluent groups while excluding underprivileged and rural populations.	Provides equity/accessibility context for why some students can or cannot join coaching.
9	Gokak, Mehendale & Bhāle (2023)	Modelling shadow institutions (ISM approach)	Proposes a structural framework for coaching institutes to sustain quality and academic outcomes under competitive pressure.	Supports the institutional/structured-guidance rationale for why students prefer coaching.

S.No.	Author(s) & Year	Focus of Study	Key Findings	Relevance to the Present Study
10	Choudhury, Kumar & Gill (2023)	Access to and cost of private coaching, higher education	Richer, more educated households access more coaching; pro-male gender bias and caste inequality found in both access and spending.	Key empirical evidence combining gender and financial dimensions, directly aligned to the RQ.
11	Bharucha (2018)	Scale of the coaching business	Nearly universal tuition uptake among surveyed students; coaching valued for its alignment with exam patterns; expenditures are substantial.	Supports the perception dimension: coaching vs. self-study.
12	Jha (2024a)	State-level policies and practices in shadow education	Competition and inefficiencies in mainstream schooling are the primary drivers of tutoring demand; regulatory gaps persist.	Provides institutional/policy context for why coaching is chosen over formal schooling.
13	Majilla (2025)	Intra-household allocation for shadow education	Girls and later-born children receive systematically less tutoring investment, contributing to gender gaps in test scores.	Direct evidence of gendered parental investment - central to the RQ's parental-influence and gender dimensions.
14	Narmada Devi et al. (2024)	Shadow education for competitive exams	Coaching plays a pivotal role in shaping academic outcomes and psychological readiness for competitive-exam preparation.	Directly supports the study's core theme - reasons for joining coaching for entrance exams.
15	Kaicker & Sharma (2026)	Determinants of tutoring expenditure	Expenditure varies by rural-urban location, income, caste and gender; tutoring functions as a coping mechanism for gaps in formal schooling.	Reinforces the financial-consideration and gender dimensions of the RQ.
16	Sharma, H. (2019)	Equity concerns in private tutoring	Tutoring has shifted from a remedial tool to a 'prestige' marker, deepening existing educational inequalities.	Informs the perception dimension - why coaching is valued beyond academic need.
17	Gangopadhyay & Sarkar (2014)	Caste/religion-based investment in coaching	Scheduled-caste households invest significantly less in private coaching, largely due to cultural rather than discriminatory factors.	Adds socio-cultural nuance to parental investment patterns.
18	Agarwal et al. (2021)	Online coaching viability post-COVID-19	Students found online coaching acceptable when institutes ensured satisfaction and testing quality; the industry is projected to grow sharply.	Directly supports the RQ's online-versus-offline preference dimension.
19	Gill, Narwana & Singh (2025)	COVID-19 impact on rural schooling	Parents increasingly turned to shadow education despite technology-access gaps,	Links online-mode access and financial considerations under pandemic-era constraints.

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			alongside a shift toward state schools amid income shocks.	
20	Nagaram et al. (2024)	Urban-rural shadow education, Tamil Nadu	Urban aspirations and competition drive demand; online platforms are improving access for rural students.	Supports the online/offline mode-preference dimension with a regional lens.
21	Aaradhi & Chakraborty (2024)	EdTech adoption in India	Functional, social, conditional and epistemic values significantly drive adoption of EdTech platforms.	Offers a theoretical basis for why students adopt online coaching modes.
22	Suneja & Bagai (2021)	COVID-19 and online/e-tutoring platforms	Blended learning gained rapid acceptance; major e-tutoring platforms expanded quickly during the pandemic.	Further supports the online-versus-offline preference dimension.
23	Rohini & Kauts (2024)	EdTech and the digital learning gap	EdTech is reshaping teaching and learning, but access to it remains uneven across student groups.	Adds an equity caveat to the study's online-coaching-preference findings.
24	Gaikwad, Pardeshi & Pandey (2022)	Online education in rural technical institutes	Institutes overcame infrastructural challenges to sustain online delivery through the pandemic.	Provides a rural-institutional case supporting online-mode adoption.
25	Choudhury, Kumar & Gill (2025)	Gender gap in private school enrolment	Household resources are associated with a persistent pro-male bias in enrolment in privately managed schools.	Direct gender-parity evidence relevant to the RQ's comparative gender analysis.
26	Kariya et al. (2026)	Parental education, self-esteem and test anxiety	Family and educational environment strongly shape adolescents' academic performance and emotional well-being.	Supports the parental-influence and exam-related psychological-pressure dimensions.
27	Agrawal, Gupta & Mondal (2024)	Determinants of tutoring demand, rural India	Household, school-level and community factors jointly shape private-tutoring demand in rural settings.	Complements the financial and parental-influence determinants examined in the RQ.
28	Singh & Bangay (2014)	Low-fee private schooling, Andhra Pradesh	School fees create household debt burdens; a complex interplay exists between private and government schooling choices.	Broadens the financial-accessibility context around educational choice.
29	Sahoo (2017)	Intra-household gender disparity in school choice	A 6-percentage-point gender gap exists in private-school enrolment, and the gap widens where private-government cost differences are larger.	Strong direct evidence of gender-based decision-making, core to the RQ.
30	Mishra (2026)	Disparities in private-school enrolment	Girls, and SC/ST/Muslim children, are significantly under-represented in private-	Further gender and equity evidence relevant to comparative analysis.

S.No.	Author(s) & Year	Focus of Study	Key Findings	Relevance to the Present Study
			school enrolment; patterns vary by gender and region.	
31	Mathrani, Sarvesh & Mathrani (2020)	Digital gender divide in online education (COVID-19)	Girls from low-income households faced constrained digital access and reduced agency during the shift to online learning.	Direct evidence of gendered barriers to online learning, linking the RQ's gender and online-mode dimensions.
32	Bala & Singhal (2018)	Gender digital divide, Uttar Pradesh	Gender digital divide is driven by exclusion from technological skills, social norms, and financial constraints.	Regionally relevant (Uttar Pradesh) evidence linking gender to online-mode preference.
33	Jha (2023)	Expansion, expenditure and effect of private tuition	Tutoring's effect on academic achievement is contested and carries unintended 'toxic by-products' for mainstream education.	Nuances the perception dimension - coaching's value is not universally clear-cut.
34	Deb, Strodl & Sun (2014)	Academic stress among private secondary students	High levels of academic stress and exam anxiety are prevalent, regardless of grades achieved.	Provides psychological context for why families invest heavily in coaching to manage exam pressure.

RESEARCH GAP

The reviewed literature offers a substantial and well-established evidence base on private coaching and shadow education in India, but this evidence clusters around a few recurring angles. One large group of studies, built largely on national datasets such as the NSSO, IHDS, and CMIE-CPHS, quantifies the scale, cost, and macro-level determinants of coaching participation, showing that household income, caste, region, and urban residence strongly predict who takes coaching and how much they spend (Singh & Singh, 2025; Kumar & Chowdhury, 2021; Choudhury, Gill & Kumar, 2024; Kaicker & Sharma, 2026). A second cluster documents gender bias in educational investment, but almost exclusively in the context of private-school enrolment or general tutoring expenditure rather than coaching for competitive entrance examinations specifically (Azam, 2016; Sahoo, 2017; Majilla, 2025; Choudhury, Kumar & Gill, 2025; Mishra, 2026). A third cluster, driven largely by the COVID-19 pandemic, examines the shift to online and EdTech-based learning, including evidence of a digital gender divide, but again treats online education broadly rather than online coaching-mode preference among entrance-exam aspirants (Mathrani, Sarvesh & Mathrani, 2020; Bala & Singhal, 2018; Agarwal et al., 2021).

What is largely missing from this body of work is a study that brings these separate strands together at the level of individual student decision-making. Few, if any, of the reviewed sources jointly examine parental influence, peer pressure, perceptions of coaching versus self-study, online-versus-offline mode preference, and financial considerations within a single, gender-disaggregated framework focused specifically on entrance-examination coaching. Most gender-focused studies address broader schooling choices rather than the coaching decision itself, and most coaching-focused studies rely on large secondary datasets that cannot capture the psychosocial reasoning behind an individual student's choice. The present study addresses this gap by directly comparing male and female students across these five decision dimensions, using primary data specific to coaching enrolment for entrance examinations, thereby extending the macro-level and single-dimension findings of the reviewed literature into an integrated, gender-comparative account that directly answers the study's research question.

METHODOLOGY

The present study adopts a descriptive research design with a thematic analytical approach to examine the factors influencing students' decisions to join coaching centers for entrance examinations. The study is primarily quantitative in nature, as it relies on structured survey data; however, thematic categorization of responses enables a nuanced interpretation of patterns across different influencing dimensions.

Data were collected using a self-structured questionnaire, designed to capture students' perceptions and decision-making factors. The instrument included items across six key dimensions: (i) perception of coaching, (ii) parental influence, (iii) peer influence, (iv) preference for coaching versus self-study, (v) online versus offline coaching preferences, and (vi) financial considerations. Each item required respondents to indicate their level of agreement in a binary format (Agree/Disagree), facilitating straightforward comparison and categorical analysis.

The responses were systematically organized and analyzed using gender as a primary analytical variable to identify differences in patterns and trends between male and female students. Thematic grouping of responses enabled the identification of dominant factors influencing students' choices, while percentage-based analysis was used to present the findings in a clear and interpretable manner, consistent with comparative gender-analysis approaches used in prior Indian education research (Sahoo, 2017; Choudhury, Kumar & Gill, 2023).

POPULATION, SAMPLE, AND SAMPLING TECHNIQUE

The population of the study comprises students preparing for various competitive entrance examinations, such as CUET, NEET, and JEE, which are characterized by high levels of competition and demand for supplementary academic support.

The sample was drawn from students enrolled in different coaching institutions, including both online and offline formats, as well as those relying on self-study. This ensured representation of diverse learning preferences and educational contexts. A random sampling technique was employed to select participants, thereby minimizing selection bias and enhancing the generalizability of the findings. The sample included students from varied academic backgrounds and learning environments, allowing for a broader understanding of decision-making patterns.

TOOL AND DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURE

Data were collected through a structured questionnaire administered to the selected participants. The questionnaire consisted of statements aligned with the six identified dimensions, and respondents were required to indicate whether they agreed or disagreed with each statement. This binary response format ensured clarity, ease of response, and consistency in data analysis.

The tool was designed to ensure content relevance and conceptual clarity, with items reflecting real-life factors influencing students' educational choices. Although the study primarily relies on descriptive analysis, the structured nature of the tool enhances its reliability and applicability in similar research contexts.

DATA ANALYSIS TECHNIQUE

The collected data were analyzed using percentage analysis and comparative methods. Responses were categorized based on gender, and the proportion of agreement and disagreement was calculated for each dimension. This approach enabled a clear comparison of male and female students' perspectives.

Additionally, thematic interpretation was applied to identify underlying trends and patterns across the different factors influencing students' decisions. The combination of quantitative representation and thematic analysis provides a comprehensive understanding of the research problem.

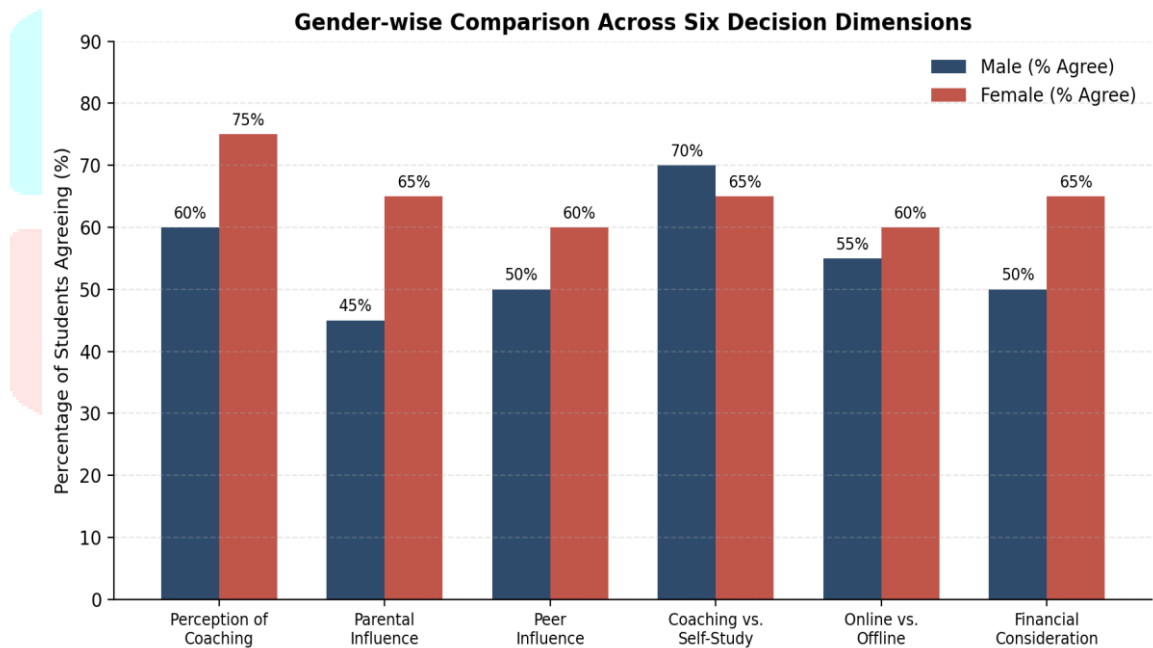
FINDINGS

The findings of the study address the research question by examining key dimensions that influence students' decisions to join coaching centers. A comparative analysis based on gender reveals several important patterns, summarized in Table 2 and Figure 1 below, and discussed dimension by dimension thereafter.

Table 2: Gender-wise Comparison Across Six Decision Dimensions

Dimension	Male		Female	
	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree
Perception of coaching	60%	40%	75%	25%
Parental influence	45%	55%	65%	35%
Peer influence	50%	50%	60%	40%
Coaching vs. self-study	70%	30%	65%	35%
Online vs. offline coaching	55%	45%	60%	40%
Financial consideration	50%	50%	65%	35%

Figure 1: Gender-wise Comparison Across Six Decision Dimensions



1. Perception of coaching

The perception of coaching as essential for success in competitive examinations is prevalent among both genders; however, it is more pronounced among female students. A majority of female respondents (75%) agreed that coaching is essential, compared to 60% of male students, while 25% of females and 40% of males disagreed. This suggests that female students demonstrate a greater reliance on structured academic support systems, consistent with evidence that shadow education is widely perceived as central to competitive-exam success (Narmada Devi et al., 2024; Kishore & Sarin, 2022).

2. Parental influence

Parental influence emerges as a significant factor, particularly among female students. Approximately 65% of female respondents reported that their decision to join coaching was influenced by their parents, compared to 45% of male students. Conversely, a majority of male students (55%) indicated independence in their decision-making. These findings highlight stronger parental involvement in shaping the educational choices

of female students, echoing evidence that parental investment in supplementary tutoring is systematically gendered (Majilla, 2025; Kariya et al., 2026).

3. Peer influence

Peer influence affects both male and female students, though it is slightly more prominent among females. While 60% of female students acknowledged that peer pressure influenced their decision to enroll in coaching centers, 50% of male students reported similar influence. This indicates that social conformity and group dynamics play a notable role, particularly among female students. Notably, this dimension remains comparatively under-examined in the India-focused shadow-education literature reviewed above (Table 1), which has concentrated more heavily on economic and parental determinants than on peer-level social dynamics — underscoring this as an area to which the present study's primary data make a direct contribution.

4. Coaching vs. Self-study

Both genders show a clear preference for coaching over self-study; however, male students exhibit a slightly stronger inclination toward coaching. About 70% of male students consider coaching more beneficial compared to 65% of female students. Nevertheless, a significant proportion of students — 30% of males and 35% of females — continue to value self-study, suggesting that coaching is perceived as a supportive rather than indispensable learning approach, in line with evidence that the academic value of private tutoring remains contested rather than universally decisive (Bharucha, 2018; Jha, 2023).

5. Online vs. Offline coaching

A growing preference for online coaching is evident among both genders, with a slightly higher inclination among female students. Approximately 60% of female students prefer online coaching compared to 55% of male students. This trend reflects the increasing importance of flexibility, accessibility, and convenience in learning environments, particularly for female students who may face mobility or time-related constraints (Agarwal et al., 2021; Suneja & Bagai, 2021). Similar shifts have been documented at the regional level, where families turned to online and shadow-education alternatives despite technology-access gaps during the pandemic (Gill, Narwana & Singh, 2025), and where online platforms have been credited with narrowing the urban-rural gap in coaching access, even as urban students remain more likely to seek it out in the first place (Nagaram et al., 2024). Institutions themselves have also had to adapt, with rural technical colleges reporting that overcoming infrastructural barriers was essential to sustaining online delivery through the pandemic (Gaikwad, Pardeshi & Pandey, 2022). At the same time, this preference should be read alongside evidence of a persistent digital gender divide in access, capability, and outcomes, which can complicate girls' ability to benefit fully from online formats (Mathrani, Sarvesh & Mathrani, 2020; Bala & Singhal, 2018), and broader concerns that EdTech expansion, while reshaping teaching and learning, has not yet closed the underlying digital learning gap for all student groups (Rohini & Kauts, 2024).

6. Financial considerations

Financial factors significantly influence students' decisions, especially among females. Around 65% of female students reported that financial constraints affected their choice of coaching mode, compared to 50% of male students, whose responses were evenly divided. This indicates that economic considerations play a more decisive role in shaping the educational choices of female students, consistent with national-level evidence that coaching expenditure is unevenly distributed by gender alongside income, caste, and region (Singh & Singh, 2025; Kaicker & Sharma, 2026), and with earlier evidence that private-schooling and tutoring fees can generate lasting household debt burdens that shape families' educational choices (Singh & Bangay, 2014). These financial pressures are compounded by the psychological weight of examination

preparation itself: research on private secondary students in India shows that high levels of academic stress and exam anxiety are widespread regardless of the grades ultimately achieved (Deb, Strodl & Sun, 2014), which may further explain why families are willing to bear significant financial strain to secure structured coaching support.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The findings of the study indicate that multiple interrelated factors influence students' decisions to join coaching centers, with significant gender-based variations. Female students appear to be more strongly influenced by external factors such as parental involvement, peer pressure, and financial considerations, whereas male students demonstrate relatively greater autonomy in their decision-making processes. This pattern is consistent with broader evidence of a pro-male bias in the allocation of household educational resources documented across the Indian shadow-education and private-schooling literature (Sahoo, 2017; Choudhury, Kumar & Gill, 2025; Azam, 2016), suggesting that gender plays a critical role in shaping educational choices, particularly in highly competitive academic contexts.

Furthermore, the increasing preference for online coaching — especially among female students — signals a notable shift in the coaching landscape. This trend may be attributed to the growing availability of cost-effective digital platforms and the flexibility they offer in terms of time, accessibility, and learning pace (Agarwal et al., 2021; Aaradhi & Chakraborty, 2024). Online coaching appears to address both financial and socio-cultural constraints, thereby making it a more viable option for a broader segment of students, although the persistence of a digital gender divide (Bala & Singhal, 2018; Mathrani, Sarvesh & Mathrani, 2020) suggests that this shift does not uniformly benefit all female students.

In spite of the widespread perception that coaching enhances performance in entrance examinations, a substantial proportion of students continue to value self-study as an effective preparation strategy. This indicates that coaching is not universally regarded as indispensable but rather as a supplementary support system that complements independent learning, a conclusion echoed by literature questioning the consistency of private tutoring's academic effect (Jha, 2023; Bharucha, 2018).

To conclude, the study underscores the multifaceted nature of students' decision-making processes regarding coaching enrollment. Gender emerges as a significant determinant, with female students being more susceptible to external influences, while both genders acknowledge the advantages of coaching over self-study. At the same time, the growing inclination toward online coaching reflects evolving educational preferences shaped by affordability and convenience. These findings extend the largely macro-level, single-dimension evidence available in the existing literature (see Table 1) into an integrated, gender-comparative account of why students choose to join coaching centers for entrance examinations.

IMPLICATIONS

Theoretical Implications

This study contributes to the shadow-education literature by integrating five previously separate strands — parental influence, peer influence, perception of coaching, mode preference, and financial consideration — within a single gender-comparative framework focused specifically on entrance-examination coaching. Where prior research has examined these factors individually or through large secondary datasets (see Table 1), this study offers primary, psychosocial-level evidence of how they operate jointly and differently across genders, offering a more integrated conceptual model of coaching-enrolment decision-making.

Practical Implications

For coaching institutes, the findings suggest that female students' stronger reliance on parental and financial considerations calls for more transparent fee structures, flexible payment options, and communication strategies that engage parents directly. The relatively higher preference for online coaching among female students also points to a market opportunity in expanding affordable, flexible digital offerings, provided that underlying digital-access gaps are addressed (Bala & Singhal, 2018).

For parents and families, the results highlight the disproportionate weight of parental expectation and financial constraint in shaping daughters' coaching choices, suggesting a need for greater involvement of female students themselves in decisions about their own examination preparation.

For policymakers and educators, the persistence of a strong preference for coaching over self-study, despite the sizeable minority who value independent study, points to opportunities for strengthening formal schooling's exam-oriented support so that reliance on costly private coaching is reduced, particularly for financially constrained households (Singh & Singh, 2025; Kaicker & Sharma, 2026). Bridging the digital gender divide should also be treated as a policy priority, given its direct bearing on whether the growing shift to online coaching benefits male and female students equally.

Limitations and Future Research

The study relies on a binary (Agree/Disagree) response format, which, while easy to administer and analyze, limits the granularity of insight into the intensity of each factor's influence. The sample, while randomly drawn, is not stratified by region, income group, or type of entrance examination, which may limit generalizability given that the reviewed literature shows these variables to be strong determinants of coaching behavior (Singh & Singh, 2025; Choudhury, Gill & Kumar, 2024). Future research should employ Likert-scale or mixed-methods designs to capture the intensity and lived experience behind these decisions, examine long-term academic outcomes of coaching relative to self-study, and further investigate how the expansion of online coaching — and the digital divide that accompanies it — is reshaping educational equity for male and female students preparing for competitive entrance examinations.

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