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EDITORIAL ANALYSIS

Not Delulu: An AI Tutor for Every Child in India

 **THE HINDU**

24 August 2026

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 The Hindu

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INTERVIEW ANGLE

"Roughly a fifth of senior-school students pay for coaching and the rest do not. If an AI tutor were free and universal, would it close that gap or simply add a third tier below the coaching centre?"

Source: [Original editorial](#)

The Hindu

 Every fact web-verified against primary sources

THE LIFT LINE

India has 65 million students in classes 9 to 12 and roughly 200,000 coaching centres serving about a fifth of them. The other four-fifths are not less ambitious. They are less able to pay.

WHY THIS EDITORIAL MATTERS FOR YOUR EXAM

It joins two heavily examined themes — **educational inequality** and **digital public infrastructure** — through a single concrete proposal. The DPI framing in particular travels: the same “public rail, private engines” argument recurs across payments, health records, logistics and now education.

GS Paper 2: Education, government policies and interventions, issues relating to development and management of social sector services. **GS Paper 3:** Science and technology, indigenisation, digital infrastructure.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

India’s coaching sector grew as a supplement to school and became, for many students, a parallel system. The **Right to Education Act, 2009** guarantees schooling to age 14, but the competitive stage that determines access to higher education sits above that guarantee, and the state has largely left it to the market.

NEP 2020 identified coaching dependence as a symptom of assessment design, arguing that examinations rewarding rote recall create the demand that coaching supplies.

THE ANALYSIS

The market, measured

MEASURE	FIGURE
Test-preparation market, FY26	about \$14.8 billion (Redseer)
Projected FY30	\$23 to \$26 billion , at 12 to 15 per cent CAGR
Coaching centres	around 200,000
Students in classes 9-12	65 million , of whom about 27 million are in government schools
Coaching incidence (NSO, 2025)	27 per cent overall — 30.7 per cent urban , 25.5 per cent rural
Implied participation	17 to 20 million students
Largest private platform	PhysicsWallah, about 4.9 million paid online users

Why no private provider can be the answer

The last two rows are the argument. The biggest platform in the country reaches roughly **4.9 million** paid users against a target population **ten to a hundred times larger**. This is not a criticism of the platform; it is a statement about what any single provider can do. Capacity and curriculum breadth are both binding.

That is what pushes the proposal toward **infrastructure** rather than toward a product. The state’s comparative advantage is not building the best tutor. It is building the rails on which many tutors can run.

The UPI analogy, and its limits

The “**public rail, private engines**” model is precisely what UPI did in payments: the state set the standard, the **interoperability** requirement and the access rule, and private applications competed on top. Applied to education, the state would set content standards, interoperability, accreditation and universal access, and let providers compete on pedagogy.

The analogy has a limit worth naming. A payment either succeeds or fails, and correctness is trivially verifiable. A tutoring interaction can be confidently wrong, and the student is the least equipped party to detect it. Accreditation in education therefore has to do far more work than it does in payments, and that is the hard design problem the analogy conceals.

DATA AND INSTITUTIONS VAULT

PRELIMS-GRADE FACTS:

India's test-prep market: about \$14.8 billion in FY26, projected to \$23-26 billion by FY30 at 12-15 per cent CAGR, per Redseer; around 200,000 coaching centres.

65 million students in classes 9-12; about 27 million in government schools.

NSO survey, 2025: 27 per cent of students taking or having taken private coaching — 30.7 per cent urban, 25.5 per cent rural; implying 17-20 million in classes 9-12.

PhysicsWallah: about 4.9 million paid online users.

Digital public infrastructure in India is usually described through the India Stack layers: identity (Aadhaar), payments (UPI), and data (the Account Aggregator and DEPA framework).

DIKSHA is the existing national digital platform for school education, under the Ministry of Education.

NEP 2020 links coaching dependence to assessment design and recommends competency-based assessment.

The Right to Education Act, 2009 covers ages 6 to 14, which is below the stage at which coaching demand concentrates.

*“public rail, private engines” is a **governance model**, not a technology choice. The state's role in UPI was to mandate interoperability and cap rent extraction, not to write the best payment app. An answer that treats DPI as “the government builds an app” has missed the argument entirely.*

THE DEBATE

For: the market has demonstrated the demand and priced out the majority; marginal cost of delivery is near zero once built; and a shared accreditation layer would raise quality across providers rather than only for those who can pay.

Against: an AI tutor without reliable connectivity and a device reaches the same households that already have coaching; hallucinated instruction is worse than no instruction and is undetectable by the learner; and treating coaching demand as a supply problem leaves the assessment design that creates it untouched.

The strongest synthesis: build the rail, but treat **accreditation and error accountability** as the primary design problem rather than an afterthought, and pursue assessment reform in parallel, because otherwise a free tutor simply industrialises rote preparation at lower cost.

HOW TO THINK ABOUT THIS

The transferable frame is **the state as standard-setter rather than as provider**. Ask of any public service: is the binding constraint that no one is providing it, or that provision is fragmented, unaccredited and inaccessible to those without means? If it is the second, infrastructure beats production.

That test explains why UPI worked and why many government apps did not.

WAY FORWARD

- ❶ **Set standards and accreditation first**, since an unaccredited AI tutor at national scale propagates error at national scale.
- ❷ **Mandate interoperability** so student progress data is portable across providers, which is what prevents lock-in and rent extraction.
- ❸ **Solve the device and connectivity floor**, or the intervention will reach precisely the households already served.
- ❹ **Pursue assessment reform in parallel**, since coaching demand is generated by what examinations reward.

PYQ LINKAGE AND PRACTICE

Connects to standing themes on **educational inequality**, **digital divide**, and **digital public infrastructure**. Practice question: *“Digital public infrastructure succeeds where fragmentation, not absence, is the binding constraint. Examine this claim with reference to education.”*

Source: Not Delulu: An AI Tutor for Every Child in India — Ujyari.com | Free UPSC & State PCS Editorial Analysis

● KEY ARGUMENTS AT A GLANCE

The Hindu argues that India's test-preparation market, estimated at 14.8 billion dollars in FY26 with around 200,000 coaching centres, prices out rural and low-income households among the 65 million students in classes 9 to 12, and that a free AI tutor should be built as open digital public infrastructure on a public rail, private engines model like UPI, with the state setting standards, interoperability, accreditation and universal access rather than becoming a content producer itself.



SUPPORTING

- The scale of the private market is the evidence of unmet demand: 14.8 billion dollars in FY26, projected to 23 to 26 billion by FY30 at 12 to 15 per cent compound growth, across around 200,000 coaching centres.
- Coaching incidence sits at roughly 27 to 30 per cent of students, with a 2025 National Statistical Office survey finding 27 per cent overall, 30.7 per cent urban and 25.5 per cent rural, implying 17 to 20 million students in classes 9 to 12 in some form of test-prep coaching.
- No private platform can serve as a sole national provider, since PhysicsWallah at around 4.9 million paid online users reaches a fraction of a target population ten to a hundred times larger, which is why the argument is for shared infrastructure rather than for a national champion.



MAINS ANSWER FRAMEWORK

QUESTION

India's private coaching market has become a parallel education system. Examine whether digital public infrastructure can substitute for it, and discuss the design conditions such a system would have to meet. (250 words)

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