Regulate private coaching classes, Unesco tells govts

A Unesco report has called for the introduction of a regulatory mechanism for private tutoring in India and other countries, observing that such a practice is "widening" the education gap between the rich and poor.

The 500-page Global Education Monitoring report, released here on Monday, has described private tutoring as one of the "professional misconducts" by teachers, besides absenteeism and acceptance of gifts.

"While remedial or individualised help may benefit students, the time and money allocated to tutoring can undermine student well-being and strain household budgets. Private tutoring can increase students' academic burden and stress. There needs to be a better regulation of private tutoring, due to be worth over $200 billion by 2020 as a global industry," the report said.

In India, in 2007-08, about 40% of urban secondary students received private tutoring, compared to about 26% of their rural counterparts. Better-educated households in urban areas with children attending private schools were more likely to pay for private tutoring, it noted.

"When teachers also serve as private tutors, it can create conflicts of interest that adversely affect learning. Private tutoring, paid out of one's own pocket, widens the education advantage gap between the haves and have-nots," it added.

In India, while a quarter are not completing lower secondary education, there are 266 million adults and 33 million youngsters unable to read, the report noted, stressing on the need to address the "gaps and inequalities".

The Unesco report has emphasised on the need to ensure that accreditation of private higher education institutions in India is better regulated.

"India has about 1 million rural medical practitioners who are not graduates of accredited schools. Government and court records showed that, between 2010 and 2015, at least 69 of the 398 medical colleges and teaching hospitals had been accused of rigging entrance examinations or accepting bribes to admit students. The regulator recommended closing 24 of the colleges," the report observed.

Digital divide

The report has also cautioned against the growing trend of the governments of various countries partnering with private tablet and laptop providers to overcome the digital divide among students and schools.

"Many such initiatives have benefited vendors, not students, owing to poor procurement and contract enforcement, as in Thailand. India abandoned its Aakash programme in 2015 without meeting its objectives. In the meantime, the vendor, DataWind, had become a leader in low-cost tablet innovation," the report observed.

Universalising laptops and tablets in schools through private engagement

requires a "strong government enforcement", it said.

The Unesco report has also disfavoured the trend of hiring teachers on contract basis, saying while contract teaching may fill dire teacher shortages, it can decrease "equitable access" to qualified teachers and cannot be considered a long-term solution.