

EXAMINATION INTEGRITY IN INDIA: BRIDGING POLICY GAPS THROUGH EFFECTIVE ANTI-PAPER LEAK LEGISLATION

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Abstract - The paper leak phenomenon in India is not a recent problem, but its rising intensity and frequent repetitive incidents necessitate us to examine its underlying causes. As students are directly affected, the issue cannot be restricted as just a mere mistake by the responsible authorities but includes authority failure, coaching mafias, poor legislative implementation, and insignificant accountability from higher officials. The paper highlights the paper-leak problem continues to exist despite implementation of the Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Act, 2024 while understanding the changing patterns of exam malpractices from traditional methods to high-tech digital processes. The paper is based on qualitative policy and doctrinal thematic research analysis. We have analysed the Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Act, 2024, along with journals, articles, Supreme Court judgments, and relevant newspaper reports due to its ability to provide evidence based framework. Francis Fukuyama, Principal-Agent Theory, John Rawls Theory of Justice, Robert K. Merton's Strain Theory, and Emile Durkheim's concepts of Anomie, explained the required government and systematic failures and consequences through a theoretical framework. It points out the psychological, and socio-economic impacts on candidates through a comparison of international exam practices with India's examination system. It identifies the Government's overdependence on private exam agencies, along with candidates' dependence on coaching centres which may contribute towards emergence an illicit paper trading market, potentially results in socio-economic inequality and psychological issues among students. Understanding the internal loopholes within the Indian exam system through an international comparison. The paper concludes that paper leak incidents should not be treated as regular criminal activities, but requires systematic reforms and proper policy implementation to create a healthier examination atmosphere.

Keywords: public exams, government failure, coaching mafia, organized crime, unfairness, student stress.

INTRODUCTION

Education is the building block of any vibrant nation, while the examination is its one pillar. If a crack appears in the pillar, the block may not be able to stand. While there has been fast-paced development within Indian regulatory agencies and systems of governance for public examinations, it is no surprise that their effectiveness still has much room for improvement.

Cases of paper leaks, cheating, and a clear lack of accountability among examination bodies keep bringing

disrepute to the entire procedure of examination. So the issue arises as to how effectively the recently introduced Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Act, 2024 has addressed the very problem it was designed to solve. According to a media-based dataset compiled by Ranka & Paudel (2026) for Parivartan, an activist organisation, an investigation into examination fraud in India from 2005 to 2026 reveals 220 cases across 21 states, affecting an estimated 10 crore students, a figure that could not be independently verified

against any official government dataset. These cases involved paper leaks, impersonation, OMR manipulation, result manipulation, and electronic cheating.

While paper leaks get the most attention, they usually do not happen on their own. They are often linked to the same issues that lead to impersonation, tampering, and organized fraud (Ranka & Paudel, 2026). So, in order to solve the problem of paper leaks, it is necessary to look at the wider picture of all the unethical actions being committed.

In this respect, the Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Act was passed by the Parliament in 2024 and came into effect on June 21, 2024, per Gazette notification No. S.O. 2422(E) (Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances and Pensions [MoPPG], 2024). The tardiness of the Act was criticized due to several large-scale paper leaks that took place before it came into effect, such as the NEET-UG and UGC-NET paper leaks of 2024 (Press Trust of India, 2024; Deccan Herald, 2024). The Act makes it a crime to get unauthorized access to question papers or answer keys, or to leak them. It forbids helping candidates cheat and sets tougher penalties for companies involved in organized criminal activities. The Act was significant because it was the first central law in India specifically designed to treat exam fraud as a criminal offense, instead of relying on laws like the Indian Penal Code – state legislation such as the Bihar Conduct of Examinations Act, 1981 (Government of Bihar, 1982) and the Maharashtra Prevention of Malpractices at University, Board and Other Specified Examinations Act, 1982 (Government of Maharashtra, 1982) had addressed malpractice earlier, but no central law had done so until 2024.

As of mid-2026, Union Minister Jitendra Singh stated in the Rajya Sabha that only 52 FIRs registered under the Act since its enforcement (Business Standard, 2026b) a modest number relative to the scale of fraud documented by in the Parivartan dataset (Ranka & Paudel,

2026).

It has been over two years since the Act was passed, yet the picture remains unclear on how well it is actually solving the problem it was created for. The Act mostly helps with the exams conducted by the Central Government. Because education falls under the Concurrent List (Entry 25, Seventh Schedule), enabling both Parliament and State Legislatures to legislate on it, this leaves State Government exams governed by their own, often older, state laws, such as the Bihar Conduct of Examinations Act, 1981 (Government of Bihar, 1982) and the Maharashtra Prevention of Malpractices Act, 1982 (Government of Maharashtra, 1982), which are often inconsistent and outdated (Business Standard, 2026a; IBTimes India, 2026). Exam fraud in India is not just about a few cheaters, it is often fueled by deeper problems such as keeping question papers safe, printing and transporting them securely – identified by the K. Radhakrishnan Committee (Business Standard, 2026c) as one of the most vulnerable points in the examination process. There is often a network of coaching centres, exam staff and criminals who see exam fraud as a profitable business, rather than occasional mistakes, as seen in the CBI's chargesheet finding of an organised syndicate involving schools and coaching centres, in which 45 people were chargesheeted (Central Bureau of Investigation, as cited in Thakur, 2024; Finshots, 2026). These failures are widely reported to affect students, especially from poor backgrounds and rural areas, who may struggle to afford delays, re-tests and legal battles (EastMojo, 2026). This eventually raises concerns about whether the exam system in India is perceived as fair, a concern echoed across public commentary (The Wire, 2026). Looking at countries like China, whose Gaokao uses AI surveillance and criminal penalties (Cheng & Hamid, 2025; South China Morning Post, 2024) and the UK, where

Ofqual enforces standards and compliance among qualification-awarding bodies rather than exam logistics directly (Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation, 2025), India's preventive and technological system seems to lag behind these standards. This raises a question: Can changing the law alone fix the integrity of our exams? This paper looks into the infrastructure and socio-economic aspects of exam fraud in India. It checks if the Act and Regulatory framework can restore trustworthiness in the examination system it is supposed to provide.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction to Examination Integrity, Policy Frameworks and Systemic Challenges :Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means Act), 2024 and Legal Frameworks

The conduction of a fair entrance without any discrepancy is a very crucial task which includes rigorous authority monitoring and most importantly the will of the concerned authority to conduct one. Malpractices or corruption in Education or conducting entrances are way more harmful than corruption in any other kinds of field as it directly impacts the students or participants who're from very distinctive backgrounds (Naik, 2024). To fix this situation and crisis, the Government of India (GOI) passed The Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Act, 2024 (The Gazette of India, 2024) to curb unfair practices and paper leaks in national competitive exams. It does this by making all organized exam offences completely cognizable and non-bailable (Public Examination Act, 2024 ,Section 10(1)). Punishments to individuals or institutions include 3 to 10 years of imprisonment under Section 11(1) of the Act and a penalty up to ₹10 lakhs to ₹1 crore (PRS Legislative Research, 2024). Implementing legal provisions doesn't necessarily prevent this issue alone but Institutional capacity, accountability and governance bodies

need to co-operate all together simultaneously.

Institutional & Governance Failures in Examination Bodies

Public institutions suffer from decay when they become rigid and fail to adapt to modern operational demands (Fukuyama, 2014). When exam bodies hand over the critical tasks to private vendors, this creates a Principal-Agent problem (Jenson & Meckling, 1976) where a lack of constant monitoring allows vendors to exploit security gaps, leading to paper leaks.

Based on these challenges, the literature points to several critical governance failures.

Lack of Permanent Staff

According to the data shared by the Ministry of Education in the Parliament, the National Testing Agency (NTA) operates with just 24 core officials on deputation. To run day-to-day operations, the agency relies heavily on external help, specifically 73 contractual workers and 124 outsourced staff (Rajya Sabha Unstarred Question No. 1802, 2024).

Managing over 6.6 crore candidates with such minimal core staff causes major operational bottlenecks and security risks (Ministry of Education, 2024).

Operational and Venue Infrastructure Failures

Exam integrity frequently breaks down due to unvetted testing centers and loose vendor accountability. Private service providers often operate without proper operational audits or security compliance, allowing staff to bypass standard procedures (Public Examinations Act, 2024, §§ 8, 10). Additionally, conducting exams in poorly secured, non-standardized venues creates physical vulnerabilities, enabling unauthorized individuals to enter test centers or alter seating arrangements to facilitate cheating (Public Examinations Act, 2024, §§ 5, 7).

Digital Security and Paper Supply Chain Failures

Another critical failure occurs during the storage, transport, and evaluation stages of examination materials. Physical supply chains remain highly vulnerable to paper leaks, unauthorized paper access, and pre-exam paper solving (Public Examinations Act, 2024, § 3). Furthermore, post-exam evaluation systems suffer from digital security gaps, including the physical tampering of OMR answer sheets after collection, unauthorized access to computer servers, and the creation of fraudulent online portals (Public Examinations Act, 2024, § 3).

Coaching Network & Organised Crime Nexus

This theme is analysed through a lens of Shadow Education (Bray, 2024) and how commercialization of education in India has fueled this phenomenon of paper leak, implying not only Government and infrastructural or Technical inefficiency as the sole reason for this (Bhorkar & Bray, 2018).

The Rise of Shadow Education as a factor and consequent inequalities in Coaching Market Expansion

With the rise in competition for admission in reputable colleges and government jobs, it has led to the creation of a large market for private coaching for examinations such as NEET, JEE, UPSC, SSC and Banking Recruitment (Bray, 2024). Beyond exam outcomes, this industry has reshaped local economies in cities where large coaching institutes cluster, with accommodation and allied businesses growing around them. This occurrence is referred to as Shadow Education (Ørberg, 2018).

Emerging Socio-Economic Differences

The Private or formal education system, which operates independently of government control, and which is largely

beneficial to middle or upper classes, has led to the widening of the inequalities and increased household expenditure (Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation [MoSPI], 2025). The government figures give a partial picture of the sector's scale: GST collections from coaching centres rose from ₹2,240.73 crore in 2019-20 to ₹5,517.45 crore in 2023-24, a nearly 150% increase, though the Ministry of Education has stated it does not maintain data on the sector's overall market revenue (Ministry of Education [MoE], Rajya Sabha reply, 2024, as cited in ThePrint, 2024). A 2025 national government survey found that 27% of students were enrolled in private coaching alongside formal schooling, with participation notably higher in urban areas (30.7%) than rural areas (25.5%) (MoSPI, 2025).

Sikar and Kota as a Pressure Hub

These two cities are known as the preparation hub for mass-participating entrances in India (Adda247, 2026; Government of Rajasthan, as cited in Deccan Herald, 2021; Press Trust of India, 2023). But on the other side of the coin, families often face financial burden due to heavy tuition fees at those big brand coachings and other important costs like housing and miscellaneous expenses (Usha, 2024).

Regulatory Frameworks and Enforcement Gaps

Weak State Enforcement

Though the States like Haryana and Karnataka have made an attempt to impose registration requirements and penalties on private coaching institutes (Haryana Registration and Regulation of Private Coaching Institutes Bill, 2024; Karnataka Education Act, 1983, Section 35), enforcement has been weak at the ground level micro execution. In order to solve the previously failed execution, the Ministry of Education circulated the Guidelines for Regulations of Coaching Centre [GRCC], 2024 recommending

registration, infrastructure norms, fixed fees, and barring classes during school hours, with implementation left to individual states through their own legislation (Ministry of Education [MoE], 2024).

Historical and Contemporary Trends in Examination Malpractices

The 2015 AIPMT Bluetooth Cheating Ring Incidents

A very strange yet high-tech cheating scam was exposed in 2015, where Haryana police intercepted candidates using Bluetooth-enabled vests and smartphones to relay leaked answer keys, leading the Supreme Court to cancel the All India Pre-Medical Test 2015 and order a fresh exam within four weeks (Tanvi Sarwal v. Central Board of Secondary Education, 2015; Republic World, 2024; Republic World, 2024).

The 2024 NEET UG Paper Leak

The allegations of paper leaks in Bihar during 2024-26 NEET UG led to CBI chargesheets against 13 accused, including school officials and intermediaries, for orchestrating the leak from a Hazaribagh examination centre (Central Bureau of Investigation, 2024; Organiser, 2024).

UGC-NET 2024 Paper-Leak controversy

In June 2024, UGC NET was cancelled amid a reported paper leak (Joy, 2024; Press Trust of India, 2024), later the CBI's investigation concluded in a January 2025 closure report that the digital evidence had been fabricated by a student (Central Bureau of Investigation, as cited in The Tribune, 2025), though a Delhi court in May 2026 questioned the closure and sought further explanation from the agency (National Herald, 2026).

Organised Crime Classification and the Legislative Shift

Through the implementation of The Public Examination (Prevention of Unfair Means) Act, 2024 and state legislation

such as Uttar Pradesh's, emphasis was put on having a legal approach in resisting such incidents further. It includes a major shift in signifying paper leak as a serious organised crime, not just as mere isolated cheating.

Recent NEET-UG 2026 paper leak controversy

But taking the recent NEET paper-leak as an important case study to address this issue in a more convincing manner, even after implementing the Act of 2024, raises the question of how and why these incidents are still taking place. According to Medical Dialogues (2026), the paper leak incident came to light after a guess paper circulating on WhatsApp had been forwarded many times, and, on comparison, the questions matched the actual NEET exam which later confirmed by the CBI, whose chargesheet specified close to 90% overlap in Biology and near-100% in Chemistry (Central Bureau of Investigation, 2026a; Medical Dialogues, 2026; Oneindia, 2026). Onwards the investigation, according to a report by The Economic Times (2026), a chemistry teacher from Sikar, Rajasthan reportedly compared the so-called guess viral paper with the actual NEET paper and identified the discrepancy. This case illustrates how, even after legal and parliamentary intervention, individual vigilance rather than institutional detection continues to play a role in exposing paper leaks, raising questions about the enacted law's effectiveness. This account was later substantiated by CBI's own investigation: in its chargesheet filed before the Special CBI Court in August 2026, the agency alleged that three NTA-appointed subject experts had been cultivated by coaching intermediaries months in advance and paid to leak confidential question papers, which were then circulated via encrypted WhatsApp and Telegram channels (Central Bureau of Investigation, as cited in LatestLY, 2026; India Observers, 2026).

Despite the growing concern, a review of the available academic and

policy literature located few studies that examine whether coaching ecosystems, examination fraud networks (Bray, 2024) and organised criminal activity (Daniele & Geys, 2015; Radaelli et al., 2019) form interconnected components of India's shadow education economy.

While looking upon the legal challenges and causes behind the paper-leak incidents throughout the systematic failure and involvement of illegal channels, the socio-economic dynamics emerged as an important part to be included in understanding the difficulty a student and may their family must go through especially in psychological and financial aspects.

Socio-Economic and Human Cost

This particular theme analyses socio-economic inequalities and profound human-cost consequences following an impact stemmed from Paper-leak incidents .

Sociological Dimensions of The 'Haves' vs 'Have-Nots'

In the Indian scenario these exams aren't important only due to its massive number of participants, but if we acknowledge the backgrounds of the participating students, the socio-economic difference is visible in a clear picture (Altbach & Mathews, 2024,). The inequality among those from privileged backgrounds and marginalised, downtrodden backgrounds and between a first generation learner against a candidate from high social capital, makes the whole competition unfair at starting itself.

Rawlsian Fairness Contradiction

From the glance of Rawlsian Fairness, famously known as John Rawls Theory of Justice , the whole system and the designed pattern complies with his idea of 'veil of ignorance' that explicitly talks about unequal social positions between rich and poor; how the paper-leak incidents reflects unequal advantage to those in power position ,who've the

unequal access to the papers. Unequal access to leaked papers and high cost coaching makes this whole scenario biased towards the candidates from privileged classes. Here, a pattern of anomie (Durkheim, 1893) that is social disruption and normalness can be drawn from an unequal socio-economic situation, conditioned towards the students from various backgrounds, appear for these competitive exams. Disproportionate Economic and Structural Burdens on Vulnerable Candidates.

Apparent costs of Cancellation

Whenever any entrance examination discrepancy occurs and consequently the whole exam gets cancelled, financial burden definitely impacts those with minimum wealth especially middle class and economically poorer low income sections to a greater extent. (Altbach and Mathews,2024).

The Collective Financial Loss

Not only coaching fees but the repeated cost of travelling to the exam centers, registration form fill-up cost, delay in admissions due to postponement of the original exam all these together shows the asymmetrical socio-economic dynamics and creates an unequal competition in the education system keeping their academic and career at hold.(Karishma Kuenzang,The Established, 2026).

Mental and psychological Havoc

Indefinite Psychological Storm

Financial or Economical consequences might seem restricted externally but the mental and psychological fight a candidate faces due to such malpractices may cause depression, chronic anxiety, and a complete loss of trust in state systems (Kamraju, 2023).

Tragedy of Human Toll

In India Competitive exams play a key role in deciding a student's long-time-spring career and spend most of their productive

years in these exams. (Altbach & Mathews, 2024). But these impacts of psychological discomforts are not only impacting the poorer section in general only, individuals notwithstanding their socio-economic background also face heavy psychological damage due to uncertainty, which may turn it into tragedies such as Suicide. (National Library of Medicine, 2020).

International Comparative Analysis (Chinese Gao-Kao Examination Model)

A comparative reference is provided to contrast India's high-stakes testing vulnerabilities with International strategy standards.

The Chinese Gaokao Model: Ordinary Higher Education Entrance Examination

The Gao kao exam is considered as one of the most stressful and highly competitive exams to get admissions in universities in China. The number of participants in this exam is also way more (12.9 million, China Daily, 2026) than the number of candidates appearing for NEET (2.28 million, Hindustan Times, 2026) UGC-NET (1.12 million, The Indian Express, 2026), JEE or other competitive exams in India. Although the Gaokao exam model is also prone to the risk of creating depression, psychological stress due to high numbers of candidates (Yifeng Cheng & M. Obaidul Hamid, 2025), along with it has previously been criticised for reservation of seats among students on different criteria and provides a picture of unequal socio-economic status. Yet it's known for the reputation of attempting to make adequate necessary reforms to establish a fair system with changing contemporary demands (Xiang and Qi Wang, 2024). International systems manage these risks through strict state-enforced isolation. In the case of Gaokao Exam, protection and securing of test materials via military-grade security and state-run testing hubs rather than private vendors (South China Morning Post, 2024).

RESEARCH GAPS

The existing Indian studies have looked at coaching centers as a private education regulatory issue (such as Guidelines for Registration and Regulation of Coaching Centres [GRCC], 2024) and paper leaks as a different issue of criminal justice Vyapam, NEET, UGC-NET, but hardly ever investigated them as a joint phenomenon. Even studies applying structural modelling to shadow institutions' internal quality management (Gokak et al., 2023) have not connected these institutional dynamics to the paper-leak and organized-crime dimension explored here.

So far, the Indian response has been limited to legislation with little attention paid to whether the international models – technology for securing exams in China and South Korea and mafia screening in Italy – could be effective in the Indian institutional environment. No research has ever assessed the potential viability of these models within the federal system of India where the exams are subject to regulation by both central and state governments.

No research exists on how an integrative approach including not just legislation, but also security and screening, and community-based solutions could help solve the issues related to coaching, leaks and organized crime. This gap is what the present study seeks to bridge by considering the coaching-examination fraud ecosystem in India as an integral phenomenon rather than separate issues.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Introduction & Research Design

This study employs a qualitative and doctrinal research design, analysing the legal texts, official committee reports, judicial documents and thematic case studies. Since the subject of Education falls under the Concurrent List (List III, Entry 25) of the Indian Constitution, Public examination governance is shared

between central and respective state authorities. Accordingly, this doctrinal study analyses how the Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Act, 2024 works alongside the different laws implemented by individual states. The main aim of this study is to identify the key security and administrative loopholes in India's competitive examination system. Rather than viewing exam failures as isolated issues, this study utilizes a holistic approach that examines the crisis of administrative failures, criminal networks, judicial gaps, and deep-rooted socio-economic pressures as interlinked challenges, connecting governance gaps directly to the rise of commercial coaching networks and organised cheating networks. In other words, this study integrates a range of perspectives to provide a complete picture of the crisis. Ultimately, this study draws out key points from this analysis to propose practical, evidence-based solutions for India's competitive examination system. The core unit of analysis is the key provisions of the Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Act, 2024, official executive recommendations, primarily the Dr. K. Radhakrishnan Committee Report (2023), and landmark judicial cases, notably *Vanshika Yadav v. Union of India* (2024). Additionally, key state-level exam laws, specifically the Bihar Conduct of Examinations Act, 1981 and the Maharashtra Prevention of Malpractices Act, 1982, chosen as among the earliest state legislation to criminalise exam malpractice and providing a pre-2024 baseline, along with official committee findings and landmark court rulings, complete the source base. These specific sources were selected because they directly govern public competitive exams in India and focus on the administrative and security gaps exposed during recent leaks.

Data Collection and Sources

The gathered data is divided into primary

legal and policy documents and secondary academic literature to examine the multidimensional malpractice crisis of the public examination system in India.

Primary documentary data includes statutory texts such as the Public Examinations Act, 2024, landmark judicial rulings, and official committee reports such as the Radhakrishnan Committee Report, 2023, which form the direct base of analysis.

Secondary sources including journal articles, policy briefs, and legal evaluations were used to support and clarify these official documents. Since this research focuses entirely on analyzing legal provisions and institutional processes, we did not collect empirical data through human participants (such as interviews) was not gathered.

Primary Legal and Policy Documents

The data gathered in this source consists of official texts generated by judicial, ministerial, and legislative bodies involved in examining and regulating the examination system in India. These documents were chosen because they establish legal authority over national testing agencies, regulate the examination integrity, and enforce official mandates for public test security.

National Laws and Statutory Frameworks

The analysis of the Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means Act, 2024), formulated by the Government of India, which penalises the networks involved in the paper leakages and imposes strict institutional punishments for the unauthorised vendors.

Ministry & Department Guidelines

The analysis of the Guidelines for Registration and Regulation of Coaching Centres (GRCC, 2024), issued by the (Ministry of Education, 2024) to regulate the 'Shadow Education System' (Bray, 1999, 2014) while prioritizing the mental health and wellbeing of the students. The cybersecurity initiatives taken by the

(MeitY, 2024) have been reviewed which focus on strict technological measures for conducting Computer-Based Tests (CBTs). These tests are disconnected from the internet to prevent unauthorized access by hackers and secure the examination centres.

Committee Recommendation

A detailed examination of the recommendations made by the committee chaired by Dr. K. Radhakrishnan (Ministry of Education, 2023) has been undertaken to restructure and revive the National Testing Agency (NTA).

Judicial Precedents and Supreme Courts Rulings

This study analyzes a landmark court ruling evaluating examination integrity, Vanshika Yadav v. Union of India (2024). This case was chosen as the primary judicial boundary because it serves as the benchmark Supreme Court ruling that assessed widespread paper leaks, equal opportunity under Article 14, and the practical limits of ordering re-examinations. To understand the loopholes in the existing legal framework, relevant case laws were reviewed to evaluate judicial responses and observations regarding examination malpractices and constitutional rights. Particular attention was given to rights enshrined in the Article 14 of the Indian Constitution, which guarantees equal and fair opportunities.

It may be noted that the data collection from the primary sources constituted the main component of the study.

Secondary Data Sources

The evaluation of journal sources, academic papers, and official reports helps to analyse the socio-economic inequalities and psychological stress the examination crisis imposes on students. This includes;

The Spread of Shadow Education Networks

This theory (Bray, 1999, 2014) attempts to explain the rapid expansion of the private tutoring sector and how its transformation into a profit-driven sector affects the competitiveness of students in an adverse manner. This view is supported by broader evidence on the commercialisation of coaching and its role in deepening socio-economic inequalities among students (Naik, 2024)

Economic & Health Reports

These reports draw on coaching-sector statistics from the Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry of India as cited in (Sarkar & Sharma, 2025), along with public health reports (Sharma, 2015) to show how the examination crisis does not just affect individual students but entire families.

Journalistic Evidence

Articles published by reputable journals including The Economic Times (2024) are used to present evidence on paper leakage scandals occurring across states, tracking down the hotspots of these incidents and ground reality of student-led protests and Karishma Kuenzang (The Established, 2026) to present socio-economic inequalities or consequences faced by students.

Theoretical and Analytical Framework

We analyse the information collected through the earlier cited sources using multiple theoretical frameworks. Instead of isolating the issues described in the materials on separate grounds, we attempt to combine various theoretical perspectives to explain administrative failures, corruption, and socio-economic inequalities arising from them.

Governance Failures and Monitoring Gaps

The integration of Fukuyama's (2004) governance, state capacity, and institutional framework along with the Principal-Agent Theory (Jensen & Meckling, 1976) is used to examine the

administrative breakdowns within public examination bodies.

Institutional Failures Within the System

This study employs Fukuyama's (2004) institutional capability model to explain why the state-level examination bodies are unable to adopt improved security measures, resulting in widespread paper leaks. This institutional weakness forces public bodies to hand over key examination functions to private agencies to conduct the examination, which opens the gates to corruption.

Accountability & Ground-Level Execution

The lack of accountability in the functioning of the shadow education sector is explained by the Principal-Agent theory by (Jensen & Meckling, 1976). Information asymmetry between the public testing authority (the principal) and private vendors or local examination centers (the agents) creates monitoring failures. The structural gap at the ground level execution leads unauthorized parties to take advantage of the situation, leading to unethical decisions and paper leaks.

Socio-Economic Inequities and Psychological Strain

The psychological strain that administrative & policy failures bring about in the minds of students is critical.

Theory of Justice

We analyze John (Rawls, 1971) Theory of Justice to discuss the injustices that exist in the overall Examination system due to the social polarization between rich and poor and its implications on equality. Ideally, every individual ought to be provided with equal opportunities. Every student, regardless of their social background, needs an equal opportunity to secure their future irrespective of their social positions.

Institutional Anomie

The concept of 'anomie' (Durkheim, 1893) would help explain the psychological ups-down brought by these crises which creates a situation of 'Normlessness', losing their power to guide human behaviour and as a consequence, these examinations leave students in a state of anomie, - a complete loss of trust and faith in the institutions.

Summary of Methodology

This multi-layered methodology is designed to evaluate systemic vulnerabilities and not just to criticize the existing system but to provide a clear framework for bringing positive reforms. Through qualitative content analysis of legislative frameworks, judicial court rulings, and institutional reports, this study utilizes examination malpractice incidents and statutory clauses as its primary unit of analysis.

The approach fulfills a dual purpose:

First, by identifying administrative and technological loopholes, this methodology provides actionable insights for policy makers to take necessary steps to restore trust between students and institutions, and bring absolute transparency to the system.

Second, it applies constitutional principles specifically under Article 14, to establish legal safeguards for protecting students rights against exam malpractices.

Thus, this methodology serves to be the foundation upon which the study's policy recommendations are developed, to create a fairer and secure examination ecosystem.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Harmonization of Centre-State Law

The gap between centre and state, due to the Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Act, 2024 is that it only addresses examinations taken under the jurisdiction of the central government, leaving state-held examinations where a good number of these acts of malpractice

are committed, and governed by laws that are either old or contradictory. A model law, like the Model Tenancy Act, may be an ideal option for the states to use as a basis for making their own laws or amending the existing laws without limiting the power of the federal government. However, only four states have adopted the Model Tenancy Act since 2021 (Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs [MoHUA], 2022), suggesting a similar model law for an exam would need stronger incentives than voluntary adoption, with a realistic timeline of 3–5 years given this precedent.

Tiered, Regionally Dispersed Security Infrastructure

China Gaokao's solution of transporting the exams using military-grade logistics and printing at the prisons (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2025; South China Morning Post, 2024) is neither practical in India, due to its sheer size and varied geography. The best solution to this problem is a tiered security structure based on the importance of the exam, with high levels of security, including GPS-based tracking of the movement of the papers, use of custody chains with biometric identification for the transportation of the papers, and centrally monitored printing, for the higher level exams like NEET and UPSC, given their national scale and history of large, organised leaks, and standardised minimum security levels for lower-tier exams. Such a system would also need clear rules on data privacy for biometric records, dedicated funding, and cybersecurity safeguards to prevent the monitoring system themselves from being compromised.

Regulatory Actions Focused on the Link between Coaching and Organised Crime

This is a unique challenge for India, as among the countries examined here, none directly address an aspect that is particular to the Indian situation, that is, the documented involvement of

structured coaching centres in facilitating the leakage (Central Bureau of Investigation, as cited in Thakur, 2024). This calls for a distinct regulatory framework for India in terms of compulsory registration and auditing of large coaching centre chains. Unlike the state-led GRCC model, this framework would need central enforcement to ensure consistency, with registration and auditing systems operational within 2 years.

Independent National Examination Integrity Authority with Regional Benches

Instead of a single authority based in Delhi trying to supervise an entire nation of India's size, a dedicated regulator that was patterned on Ofqual's approach of setting and enforcing qualification standards through recognised awarding bodies, but with a different structure, regional benches could provide a better balance between centralized standard-setting and enforcement ability. This institution would also address the question of jurisdiction mentioned before in this paper. Modelled on Ofqual's standards-and-recognition role rather than direct exam-security operations, this authority would likely require sustained central funding, with the Delhi headquarters and a pilot regional bench established within the first 2 years, expanding nationally thereafter.

LIMITATIONS

This research study has certain limitations:

First, the study mainly uses secondary data like government reports. No personal interviews or surveys were carried out with the students, coaching center operators or examination officials. It does not include the individual experiences and opinions of students who may have been directly affected by irregularities in the examination.

Second, the examination fraud figures come from different sources and

are not directly comparable. As per the official database, only 52 FIRs have been registered under the 2024 Act, whereas the Parivartan database (Ranka & Paudel, 2026) shows about 220 incidents in 21 states (2005–2026). This makes the comparisons complicated by differences in coverage and case types.

Third, the comparison with China, South Korea and Italy is mostly drawn from secondary sources. It cannot be considered a detailed, first-hand study of the examination systems of these countries. Therefore, some variations in their legal, administrative and federal structure may not be fully captured in the comparison with India.

Fourth, the Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Act, 2024 is a new legislation. Its long-term effect on examination fraud and examination management is not yet fully assessable. Some conclusions on its effectiveness are drawn from the limited evidence available at present.

Finally, the research is more focused on qualitative study of the literature, legal documents, and secondary sources. Thus, the findings can be interpreted differently and they do not provide an exhaustive overview of various cases of examination cheating in India.

CONCLUSION

This paper examines how exams act as the primary gateway to success in a society built on education. Since exams are so critical, any problems with the testing agencies can damage the education system. In India public exams are supposed to be fair and give everyone an equal opportunity, no matter what their family background or connections are. When things like exam paper leaks happen they break this promise. If we look at what happened with the 2026 NEET-UG leak we can see why this keeps happening. The Public Examinations Act, 2024 makes leaks a crime, but it does not fix the underlying problems that make leaks possible in the first place, such as

poor management and relying on private companies.

The results of the paper support the hypothesis developed by Rawls. The connection between coaching centres and organized crime is not the result of individual failures, since students do not begin from equal positions but differ in economic status. Similarly, the stress and anxiety documented in the cases examined reflect predictable failures in the system, rather than isolated incidents.

The objective of this research is to prove the possibility to fix the system and make people believe in India's examination system once again. The government has identified such problems and has taken some actions towards solving this issue; these include the adoption of the 2024 Act and creation of the Dr. K. Radhakrishnan Committee for the NTA. However, if we look at the framework we can see that these changes are still missing some important things, such as making sure that the laws at the national and state level are consistent, creating a secure infrastructure regulating the connection between coaching centers and organized crime and having an independent authority to oversee the integrity of exams. We need to address all of these issues rather than trying to fix each one separately. Ultimately, lessons derived from this paper can enable India to create a reliable and equitable examination system that will protect youths' dreams and dedication.

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