

MORE THAN MARKS

S A F A L A L I

With a background in Neurosciences from renowned institutions like Harvard Medical School, Safal Ali could have chosen many paths. But it was in a small classroom, tutoring students, that he found his true purpose. Over the years, what began as a side hustle evolved into LEAP — Learn, Evolve And Progress — an educational initiative that champions consistency over competition, empathy over ego, and real learning over rat-race results. Safal brings a rare blend of scientific insight, teaching instinct, and deep human connection to everything he does. Here's more about this educator, as he shares his journey, philosophy, and work with us.

You've studied Neurosciences at some of the most prestigious institutions, including Harvard Medical School. What first sparked your interest in science and education?

I've always believed that having a scientific temperament is key to truly understanding science. I was fairly good at academics and genuinely enjoyed learning. A big part of the credit goes to my mother — she made sure I received the best education possible. But more than anything, I learned by observing her. I worked incredibly hard throughout school, and somewhere along the way, I began teaching as a side hustle. That's when I realised education wasn't just something I was good at — it was where my heart, skill set, and future belonged. I did go on to complete my graduation, but by the end of it, I knew education was my calling.



Safal Ali

Weren't you discouraged when you decided to switch career paths?

Absolutely — from every direction! In fact, some of my own teachers reached out to say I was meant for “bigger” things. While I know it came from a good place, I was surprised they saw their own profession as something lesser. For me, teaching is one of the most powerful platforms — you're shaping minds, influencing generations, and quietly building a better nation.

What inspired the creation of LEAP, and what sets it apart from other learning spaces?

It all began with me giving tuitions. I felt I had the right mix — strong subject knowledge, conceptual clarity, and the ability to explain things well. But what truly pushed me was observing the shift in the education landscape. Schools were emerging more as businesses than legacies. Teachers were hopping jobs without accountability, and students were left stranded. I grew up with consistent study habits and wanted to offer that same sense of stability to children.

What started in 2012 as a small tutoring centre evolved into LEAP — Learn, Evolve And Progress. Today, LEAP is about much more than academics. It's a nurturing space where children aren't shamed for not knowing something. We've built a team of passionate teachers who choose to be here because we prioritise mental health — for both students and teachers — over rigid outcomes.



You teach Physics, Chemistry, Biology, and even Entrepreneurship. How do you manage such a wide range of subjects?

I teach Biology, Physics, and Chemistry to Grades 11 and 12. Some people find that surprising — but I see them as branches of the same tree, rather than isolated silos. Teaching all three gives me a comprehensive view of a student's NEET preparation. I can pinpoint exactly where the gaps are.

The rest of the team handles after-school support for Grades 4–10 (CBSE, ICSE, and IGCSE), and we also run a phonics programme for ages 3–7. All our teachers are trained to work effectively with neurodivergent learners as well.

How do you approach teaching neurodivergent students differently?

We need to shift from labelling to supporting. Terms like ADHD and dyslexia are often thrown around... but the problem arises when diagnoses are used just to label, rather than to guide.

I'm terrible with tech — but I don't let that define me. I seek help where I need it. That's the mindset we encourage. We treat our neurodivergent students with the same respect as anyone else — giving them the time, space, and encouragement to learn at their own pace. Self-directed learning, patience, and trust go a long way.

What does your student success rate look like?

Honestly, you could walk into most medical colleges in Hyderabad and find at least one LEAP student there. Yes, we've had state-level subject toppers — and I'm proud of that. But I'm just as proud of the student with ADHD and dyslexia who scored 75% in Physics, Chemistry, and Maths in Grade 12.

In over a decade — with God's grace — not one student I've taught has ever failed a board exam. That's what I value most: the steady, unwavering support system we've built.



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What role do parents play in your educational model?

A huge one — and I'm very clear about setting expectations from the beginning. This isn't a space for shortcuts or trophy children. We're passionate, we know what we're doing, and we work best with parents who are ambitious but realistic.

I maintain constant communication with them because we all need to be aligned. Parents who are obsessed only with marks usually don't stick around. But those who value consistency, growth, and long-term thinking — they resonate with our approach. Every single student at LEAP has shown improvement. And every one of them came to us through word of mouth — I've never had to advertise.

With AI and tech transforming how we learn, how do you see the role of a human mentor evolving?

We had similar debates when e-learning took off. But the truth is, those committed to quality will always stay relevant.

Students and parents who come to us already know the difference we offer. AI might replace inefficiency — but it can never replace empathy. And that's something only a human mentor can provide. — as told to Anahita Dhawan

