



The Role of Accreditation in Shaping Academic Standards: A Review

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Abstract

The process of accreditation has emerged as a vital mechanism for ensuring and enhancing the quality of higher education across the globe. In the context of Indian universities, accreditation serves not only as a benchmark for academic standards but also as a catalyst for institutional improvement, accountability, and competitiveness. This review paper critically examines the role of accreditation in shaping academic quality by analysing a wide spectrum of National and International literature. It explores how accreditation frameworks—particularly those governed by agencies like NAAC and NBA—impact curriculum design, teaching methodologies, infrastructure development, and overall institutional performance. Through a comparative lens, the study evaluates how accreditation has influenced higher education quality in India relative to other global practices, drawing insights from countries like the USA, Chile, Vietnam, Bangladesh, Ukraine, and Taiwan. Findings suggest that while accreditation promotes a structured approach to quality assurance, its effectiveness is often hindered by excessive bureaucracy, variability in institutional readiness, and a focus on compliance over innovation. The review highlights both the achievements and limitations of the accreditation system and offers recommendations for more adaptive, outcome-based, and context-sensitive approaches. Overall, the paper underscores that meaningful accreditation practices are critical for advancing the academic standards and global relevance of Indian higher education institutions.

Keywords: *Accreditation, Quality Assurance, Higher Education, Indian Universities, Academic Standards, NAAC, NBA, Institutional Performance, Comparative Study*

Introduction

In the rapidly evolving landscape of global education, quality assurance has become a central concern for higher education institutions (HEIs), especially in developing nations like India. With the mass expansion of higher education and increasing demand for accountability, accreditation has emerged as a strategic tool to ensure that academic institutions maintain and continuously improve their standards. Accreditation is a formal process by which an external body evaluates the quality and effectiveness of an institution or its specific programs, based on pre-defined criteria. In India, accreditation is primarily conducted by statutory bodies such as the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) and the National Board of Accreditation (NBA), both of which play a significant role in assessing academic practices, infrastructure, faculty competence, student outcomes, and governance. This process is not only vital for institutional reputation but also for accessing funding, attracting students, and fostering





global collaborations. As Indian universities strive to align with global standards, accreditation serves as a driving force for academic excellence, transparency, and competitiveness. However, the effectiveness of accreditation in genuinely improving quality remains a subject of ongoing debate. Critics argue that the process is often bureaucratic, overly focused on documentation, and may not necessarily reflect the real-time academic performance or innovation capacity of institutions. This paper attempts to review and synthesize existing literature on the role of accreditation in shaping academic standards in Indian universities while drawing comparative insights from international contexts. The objective is to understand the tangible impact of accreditation processes on quality enhancement and to identify best practices that can inform policy and practice. By analysing both the strengths and limitations of accreditation systems, this review aims to provide a balanced perspective on how Indian higher education institutions can better leverage accreditation as a mechanism for meaningful and sustainable quality assurance in an increasingly competitive global education environment.

Accreditation

Accreditation is a review process to determine if educational programs meet defined standards of quality. Once achieved, accreditation is not permanent—it is renewed periodically to ensure that the quality of the educational program is maintained.

In the United States, academic accreditation is voluntary, decentralized, and carried out by many non-governmental, non-profit organizations. The process of academic accreditation typically culminates in an external quality review by a team of professional experts from academy or industry. These experts volunteer their time, professional knowledge, and experience to this process of quality assurance and ongoing improvement to education in their disciplines.

In other countries, accreditation may be required or governmental. The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) provides information about accreditation and quality assurance in countries outside of the United States.

ABET Accreditation

ABET accreditation serves as a recognized form of quality assurance for academic programs within the fields of applied and natural sciences, computing, engineering, and engineering technology. Rather than functioning as a ranking system, ABET accreditation certifies that a program meets the rigorous standards established by the relevant technical profession. This accreditation is internationally acknowledged as a marker of programmatic excellence and professional relevance. It is important to note that ABET confers accreditation solely to specific programs, rather than to degrees, departments, colleges, institutions, or individuals.

ABET operates as a federation comprising member professional and technical societies. These societies, through the active participation of their members, collaboratively establish and maintain standards of quality, referred to as the ABET Criteria. Accreditation evaluations are based on these criteria, with review teams assessing programs under consideration to determine compliance and to uphold the integrity of professional education standards.





Review of literature

Author(s) & Year	Region/ Country	Study Focus	Key Findings/Conclusions
Hayward, 2006	Africa	Reviewed accreditation and QA systems across Africa, highlighting limited data but growing complexity in QA processes.	Emphasized need for strong QA systems aligned with national and global norms.
Mishra, 2006	India	Introduced quality assurance concepts in HEIs; stressed role of NAAC and training of assessors.	Highlighted foundational understanding of QA processes.
Gouws & Waghid, 2007	South Africa	Analysed QA discourse; linked QA to democratic engagement in HEIs.	Argued QA can enhance democracy through stakeholder dialogue.
Popa, 2007	General	Defined QA terminology and traced evolution of QA methods and frameworks.	Emphasized misuse and variation in understanding QA terms.
Jerez et al., 2010	Chile	Explored relationship between public policy indicators and accreditation outcomes.	Dropout rate found to be the only significant predictor of accreditation.
Westerheijden et al., 2010	Vietnam	Evaluated Profit project and initial accreditation practices.	Noted benefits and challenges of new QA implementation.
Jarvis, 2014	Global	Critiqued global QA practices under neoliberal governance.	QA seen as market-driven and regulatory rather than developmental.
Eaton, 2015	USA	Outlined decentralized and complex US accreditation system.	Accreditation is a private, non-governmental QA initiative.
Chen & Hou, 2016	Taiwan	Studied dual-track system including self-accreditation.	Self-accreditation allowed customized QA practices.
Islam et al., 2017	Bangladesh	Investigated readiness and challenges of QA systems in HEIs.	Identified governance and QA framework gaps.
Stura et al., 2019	Italy	Assessed AVA system across disciplines.	Engineering programs excelled in QA due to technical orientation.
Ulker & Bakioglu, 2019	International	Surveyed administrator perceptions of accreditation impact.	First-time accreditation had stronger quality impact.
Kumar et al., 2020	India	Studied effects of accreditation on HEI quality.	Accreditation improved quality standards and institutional excellence.
Duarte & Vardasca, 2023	Multinational	Reviewed certification timelines and bureaucratic barriers.	First-time/new programs face longer, complex procedures.
Mykhailova et al., 2024	Ukraine	Analysed accreditation's alignment with European QA norms.	Lack of standardized evaluation; proposed reforms based on EU models.





Higher Education Accreditation Bodies in India

Higher education accreditation bodies decide the worthiness of the degree awarded by learning institutes in India. Accreditation assures the quality of services of higher learning institutions and courses to any external organization. They can evaluate the credibility of a degree and determine if the institute meets the applicable standards. It plays a crucial role in its acceptance by other recognized organizations and employers.

Therefore, it is of utmost importance for students to keep accreditation on top priority while selecting an institution for higher education. This ensures that their degree or course meets specific educational standards set by the accreditation agency.

IMPACT OF NAAC ACCREDITATION

NAAC accreditation has a significant impact on the quality of higher education in India. Institutions that have received accreditation have reported an improvement in their academic programs, infrastructure, and research output.

The impact of NAAC accreditation on higher education institutions can be summarized as follows:

1. **Enhances institutional reputation:** NAAC accreditation provides an objective and independent assessment of an institution's quality, leading to enhanced reputation and prestige.
2. **Increases student enrolment:** Institutions that are NAAC accredited have an advantage in attracting students, as parents and students recognize the value of a quality education.
3. **Eligibility for government funding:** NAAC accreditation is a requirement for institutions to receive government funding. Accredited institutions are eligible for grants, scholarships, and other financial assistance.
4. **Promotes internationalization:** NAAC accreditation provides recognition of an institution's quality, which can attract international students and faculty, leading to increased diversity and cross-cultural exchange.
5. **Encourages research and development:** Accreditation promotes research and development, as institutions are evaluated on their research output, innovation, and engagement with the community.
6. **Facilitates collaboration:** NAAC accreditation facilitates collaboration between institutions, as accredited institutions are recognized for their quality, making them desirable partners for research and other collaborations.
7. **Improves employability of graduates:** Accreditation ensures that graduates have received quality education, leading to improved employability and better job opportunities.
8. **Promotes continuous improvement:** NAAC accreditation promotes a culture of continuous improvement, as institutions strive to maintain or improve their accreditation status, leading to better performance and outcomes.
9. **Encourages institutional autonomy:** NAAC accreditation encourages institutional autonomy, as institutions are given the freedom to design their curriculum, policies, and procedures.





Functions Of NAAC

The functioning of the NAAC involves a multi-stage process that begins with an institutional self-study and ends with the accreditation decision. The following is a detailed overview of how the NAAC operates:

1. **Institutional Self-Study:** The NAAC process starts with an institutional self-study where the institution evaluates its strengths and weaknesses and prepares a report on its performance in various areas. This report is known as the Self-Study Report (SSR). The SSR serves as a basis for the on-site visit by the NAAC team.
2. **Peer Review:** The NAAC has a team of assessors, called the Peer Team, which conducts an on-site visit to the institution to verify the information provided in the SSR. The Peer Team consists of academic experts, industry experts, and stakeholders. The team evaluates the institution based on the NAAC parameters and gives feedback on its strengths and weaknesses.
3. **Assessment:** After the on-site visit, the NAAC assesses the institution based on the NAAC parameters and assigns a grade to it. The grade ranges from A++ to C. The institution can also receive an 'Unaccredited' or 'Not Eligible' status.
4. **Accreditation Decision:** The final accreditation decision is taken by the Accreditation Committee, which is chaired by the Director of NAAC. The Committee considers the report of the Peer Team and the assessment report to take a decision on accreditation.
5. **Accreditation Status:** Once the Accreditation Committee approves the accreditation, the institution is awarded an accreditation status for a specified period. The accreditation status is valid for a period of five years for colleges and seven years for universities.
6. **Re-Accreditation:** Institutions can apply for re-accreditation after the expiry of their accreditation status. The re-accreditation process is similar to the initial accreditation process, and the institution has to demonstrate improvements made since the previous assessment.

The NAAC also conducts Capacity Building Programmes (CBPs) for institutions to help them prepare for the accreditation process. The CBPs are designed to equip institutions with the necessary skills and knowledge to undertake the self-study and prepare the SSR. Thus it has been instrumental in driving quality improvements in higher education institutions and promoting excellence in higher education.

Higher Education and NAAC

Every five years, the success rate of universities, autonomous colleges, and colleges connected to universities is evaluated. Academicians, intellectuals, and officials associated with the NAAC gather information about worldwide standards and experiences that form the basis of the program for evaluating an institution. It evaluates the effectiveness and academic brilliance of the instructors at an institution in addition to inspecting the facilities and infrastructure. It assigns grades based on an institution's prospects and performance.

The University Grants Commission (UGC) has the responsibility of maintaining the standard of education in Indian universities. UGC is mandated to oversee "the establishment and upholding of standards for teaching, examinations, and research in universities" according to





Section 12 of the University Grants Commission Act of 1956. In order to carry out this obligation, the UGC has been working tirelessly to create systems that either directly or indirectly track college and university excellence. National research facilities and Academic Staff Colleges, which offer subject-matter refresher courses and help reorient teachers, have been formed in an effort to improve quality.

The National Eligibility Test (NET), which is administered by the UGC as well, is currently administered by the CBSE in order to establish high standards for instruction. Over the years, a number of education-related committees and commissions have underlined, either directly or indirectly, the necessity of quality improvement and recognition in the Indian higher education system. The idea of quality improvement serves as the foundation for the Kothari Commission's (1964–1966) recommendation of autonomous colleges. The availability of educational options has greatly increased at all levels, especially in higher education, since the National Policy on Higher Education was adopted in 1968. As educational institutions grew, so did the need for excellence. Education was included in the concurrent list of provisions in the 1976 constitutional amendment, which increased the central government's accountability for quality enhancement. The New Education Policy (1986) placed a strong emphasis on identifying and rewarding institutions that perform exceptionally well as well as monitoring institutions that fall short of expectations. As such, the 1986 Programme of Action (PoA) declared that the University Grants Commission (UGC) would be responsible for maintaining and promoting educational standards. As such, the UGC would first create an Authentication and Assessment Council as a separate entity. The UGC formed the NAAC in Bangalore on September 16, 1994, as a recognized autonomous entity according to the provisions of the Society Registration Act of 1860, following eight years of intense and ongoing deliberations.

History of the NAAC

The following are the turning points in the development of NAAC:

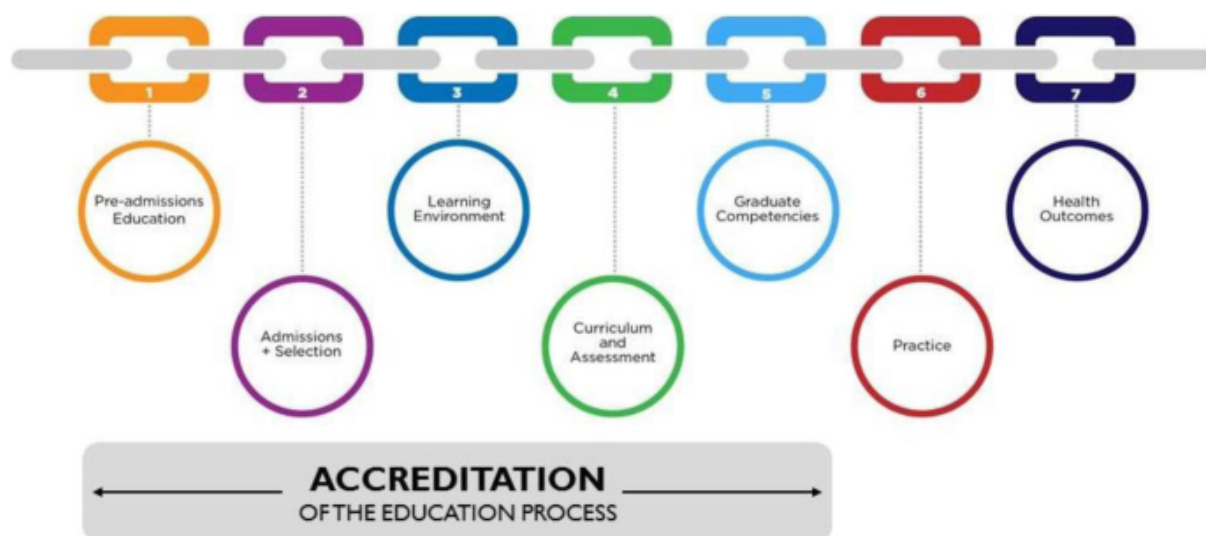
1. In 1986, the University Grants Commission established an advisory panel on the Authentication and Assessment Council, including fifteen members led by Dr. Vasant Gowarikar.
2. 1987–1990: To discuss the Gowarikar Committee report, 9 regional seminars and one national seminar were held.
3. 1990: The project report that Dr. Sukumaran Nair provided to UGC indicated the agreement to have an approved agency report to UGC.
4. In 1992, the updated New Education Policy reaffirmed the commitment to continuous improvement of educational establishments.
5. The Prof. G. Ram Reddy commission was formed in July 1994 with the goal of finalizing the accreditation board's rules and regulations as well as the memorandum of association.
6. September 1994 saw the establishment of the NAAC in Bangalore.





Accreditation as quality assurance

Accreditation is often cited as an essential ingredient in HPE systems: it is a process to ensure that high quality education produces competent graduates to serve a population's needs. Figure 1 describes how accreditation connects to the links in the quality chain of the health professions. In this sense, accreditation is a form of QA in which programs and institutions and/or systems are measured against pre-defined expected characteristics. A decision is made after an accreditation review as to whether the program/institution has met the standard. This mode of accreditation can be high stakes: careers, programs, funding, reputations, services, and learner advancement can all depend on the review's findings". This is a summative view of accreditation: accreditation as bulwark to quality and sheriff for suboptimal training.



Conclusion

In conclusion, accreditation plays a pivotal role in enhancing the quality and accountability of higher education institutions in India. It provides a structured framework for continuous improvement, encourages adherence to academic standards, and fosters a culture of transparency and institutional benchmarking. However, its impact varies depending on institutional readiness, the effectiveness of implementation, and the balance between compliance and innovation. Drawing insights from global practices, it is evident that accreditation must evolve into a more outcome-oriented and flexible system. For Indian universities to remain competitive and globally relevant, accreditation should be embraced not as a regulation but as a catalyst for genuine academic excellence.

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