

Impact of NAAC Accreditation on Student Perception of Quality in Higher Education Institutions: A Comparative Study of Accredited and Non-Accredited Universities in India

Ashish¹, Dr. Pooja Gupta²

¹Research Scholar, School of Commerce & Business Management, Geeta University, Panipat, Haryana-India

²Associate Professor, School of Commerce & Business Management, Geeta University, Panipat, Haryana-India

Abstract

Quality assurance has become a central concern in higher education due to increasing competition, institutional expansion, and growing stakeholder expectations. In the Indian context, the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) play a significant role in evaluating institutional quality; however, limited attention has been given to how accreditation is perceived by students themselves. This study explores the relationship between NAAC accreditation and students' perception of quality by comparing accredited and non-accredited universities in India. Using a descriptive and comparative research design, data are obtained from 200 undergraduate and postgraduate students through a structured questionnaire based on a five-point Likert scale. The analysis employs descriptive statistics and independent sample t-tests to examine variations in student perceptions across key quality dimensions, including teaching-learning processes, infrastructure and learning resources, evaluation and assessment practices, and student support services. The results reveal clear and statistically significant differences between the two groups, with students from NAAC-accredited universities expressing higher levels of satisfaction across all dimensions of quality. These findings suggest that accreditation is closely associated with improved institutional practices that are meaningfully experienced by students. The study underscores the relevance of NAAC accreditation as an effective quality assurance mechanism and provides insights for policymakers and institutional leaders seeking to strengthen student-centred quality enhancement in Indian higher education.

Keywords- NAAC Accreditation; Student Perception; Quality Assurance; Higher Education Institutions; Institutional Quality; India

1. Introduction

The concept of quality assurance has taken center stage in the systems of higher education in different parts of the world because of the escalating level of competition, massification of education and the growing demands of stakeholders (Harvey and Green, 1993). In India, the growth of institutions of higher learning (HEIs) has cast fundamental concerns about their sustainability in terms of academic quality, accountability and institutional effectiveness. To resolve these issues, quality assurance systems like accreditation have been entrenched to assess the performance of universities and colleges in order to improve on them (Altbach, Reisberg, and Rumbley, 2019).

The National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC), developed by the University Grants Commission (UGC) in 1994, is the ultimate committee in evaluation and accreditation of the HEIs in India. The purpose of NAAC accreditation is to enhance the culture of quality by assessing the institutions according to a set of predetermined criteria such as curricular issues, teaching and learning processes, research and innovation, infrastructure, student support, governance, and institutional values (NAAC, 2023). The status of accreditation is widely considered as the sign of institutional credibility and quality, which affects the decisions on the funding, admission of students, and perception by citizens.

Students are also the main stakeholders in measuring the quality of any institution since they are the main beneficiaries of the educational services. Student quality includes the experiences that they have regarding teaching effectiveness, learning resource, academic environment, infrastructure, assessment systems, and support services (Douglas, Douglas, and Barnes, 2006). According to some previous research, positive student perceptions are directly connected with academic satisfaction, retention and institutional reputation in general (Elliott and Healy, 2001). This has made the perception of the students to be a crucial element of quality assurance and institutional evaluation.

Although the focus on NAAC accreditation is increasing, it is still uncertain whether the accreditation has a real effect on students in terms of perceived quality of education. Although accredited institutions are supposed to have high standards in academic and administrative performance, empirical studies that compare student perception in NAAC-accredited and non-accredited universities are few, especially in the Indian context. Research shows that accreditation has a positive effect on practices and learning environments within an institution (Brennan & Shah, 2000), yet some studies claim that accreditation does not necessarily lead to an enhanced student experience (Cheng, 2015).

In that regard, this study aims to investigate the effects of NAAC accreditation on student perception of quality in higher education institutions through a comparative study of the accredited and non-accredited universities in India. The study can help to keep the discussion of the effectiveness of accreditation as a quality assurance tool, and the data obtained may be utilized by the policy makers, accreditation bodies, and institutional leaders who want to improve the quality of education and accountability.

2. Objectives of the Study

To compare the perceived quality dimensions between NAAC-accredited and non-accredited universities in India

3. Hypotheses of the Study

H₀₁: There is no significant difference in students' perception of overall quality between NAAC-accredited and non-accredited universities in India.

4. Review of Literature

Quality assurance and accreditation are now very vital tools of analyzing and refining the higher education institutions globally. The concept of accreditation is also becoming synonymous with institutional legitimacy, accountability and trust of stakeholders, in the Indian context. A number of researchers have looked at the accreditation systems and their results, especially in terms of student-based quality indicators.

The study by Singh and Sharma (2018) investigated the efficacy of accreditation models in Indian universities and discovered that accredited institutions were characterized by superior governance activities and organized academic activities. The study however observed that compliance with accreditation requirements by the institutions does not necessarily lead to better student experiences unless the reforms are successfully realized at the classroom level.

In Indian higher education, Mukhopadhyay (2019) evaluated the level of student satisfaction as an indicator of institutional quality and pointed out that the level of student satisfaction is influenced by academic performance, the responsiveness of the faculty, the nature of infrastructure and the services provided by the institution. The research pointed out that perceived institutional credibility is predominantly linked with accreditation status by students, whereas there might be variation in direct academic benefits depending on the institution.

In their comparative analysis of Indian public and private universities, Srivastava and Rai (2020) found that accredited institutions can generally achieve higher results in terms of learning resources and administrative transparency. However, the authors warned that accreditation may not address the lack of teaching quality and curriculum relevance, which is also one of the most important factors of student perception.

Kumar and George (2021) discussed the connection between quality assurance practices with engagement of students in institutions of higher learning. Their results indicated that students of approved universities claimed more academic involvement and access to institutional assistance apparatus. The research inferred that accreditation has a positive impact on the institutional culture that would indirectly affect the student perceptions of quality.

Basu (2021) explored whether internal quality assurance cells (IQACs) can improve the student-centered learning outcomes. The study showed that schools that had vigorous quality assurance practices had a high student feedback rating, especially on teaching effectiveness and evaluation fairness. Nonetheless, it was noted in the study that there is a need to monitor on a continuous basis not just during cycles of accreditation.

Rao and Pillai (2022) analyzed the perception of the Indian university service quality among their students based on the SERVQUAL model. The authors concluded that there were considerable disparities in how reliable, responsive, and

assuring were the perceived qualities of accredited and non-accredited institutions. The authors claimed that accreditation status enhances the institutional processes, which translate into service quality perception of the students.

Patel and Mehta (2022) put infrastructure and learning resources under consideration as predictors of the perceived quality of education. They found that, through their empirical research, the students of accredited institutions reported more satisfaction with digital facilities, libraries and academic support services. The research also supported the idea that accreditation promotes institutional resources in a systematic way.

Chatterjee (2023) compared the effect of accreditation in academic reputation and student enrolment trends over the long term. The results indicated that accredited institutions draw high expectations students on the aspect of quality which further puts pressure on institutions to be in the standard. The researchers highlighted the significance of overlaying the outcomes of the accreditation on student-focused quality improvement.

Despite the above studies that identify the institutional advantage of accreditation, few studies have directly compared the student perception of quality of NAAC-accredited and non-accredited universities in empirical data. In addition, the literature available tends to address institutional performance measures instead of academic experiences that students have lived. The presence of this gap highlights why a comparative study with a focus on student perception is required, and it is what the current study will aim to provide.

5. Statement of the Problem

The National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) accreditation is commonly considered one of the main quality indicators of the Indian higher education institutions, yet its real effect on the perceived quality of education by the students has not been studied sufficiently. Although NAAC accreditation is meant to increase academic standards, infrastructure and institutional governance, there is scanty empirical data on whether these gains are meaningfully felt by the student. Further, there is limited research done on the comparative study of the variations in student perception between NAAC-accredited and non-accredited universities in India. This gap will require a systematic study on whether NAAC accreditation has any significant influence on the perception of the students regarding the quality of education on the main academic and support dimensions.

6. Research Methodology

6.1 Research Design

The current research took the descriptive and comparative research design to investigate the effects of NAAC accreditation on the perception of quality among the students in higher education institutions. It was also deemed suitable because the design will help compare two different groups of students in NAAC-accredited and non-accredited universities on various quality measurements.

6.2 Population and Sample

Students enrolled in India universities (undergraduate and postgraduate) constituted the population of the study. To give an opportunity to represent both NAAC-accredited and non-accredited universities, a sample was selected. The selection of students was done using stratified random sampling method to reduce sampling bias since students who were selected were different in the academic streams. The sample size was found to be sufficient to conduct a statistical analysis and test the hypothesis.

6.3 Sampling Technique

The stratified random sampling approach was used, whereby universities were initially stratified according to NAAC accreditation status. Students were then chosen at random in each stratum so that there is equal representation and comparability of the two groups.

6.4 Data Collection Tool

Primary data were collected using a **structured questionnaire** developed specifically for the study. The instrument consisted of two sections:

- **Section A:** Demographic information of respondents

- **Section B:** Statements measuring students' perception of quality across key dimensions, including teaching–learning processes, infrastructure, evaluation practices, and student support services

Responses were recorded using a **five-point Likert scale** ranging from *Strongly Agree (5)* to *Strongly Disagree (1)*.

6.5 Variables of the Study

- **Independent Variable:** NAAC Accreditation Status (Accredited / Non-Accredited)
- **Dependent Variable:** Student Perception of Quality
 - Teaching–Learning Process
 - Infrastructure and Learning Resources
 - Evaluation and Assessment Practices
 - Student Support Services
 - Overall Student Perception of Quality

6.6 Validity and Reliability of the Instrument

Content validity of the questionnaire was assessed by having it reviewed by academic professionals in higher education. The internal consistency of the scale was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, and the coefficient obtained was greater than 0.70, which is the acceptable threshold for internal consistency.

6.7 Data Collection Procedure

This survey was conducted using both face-to-face and the online questionnaire method of giving out the questionnaire. The involvement was voluntary and respondents were promised of confidentiality and anonymity in order to obtain unbiased and honest responses.

6.8 Statistical Tools and Techniques

Collected data were coded and analyzed using **Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS)**. The following statistical techniques were employed:

- Descriptive statistics (frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation)
- Independent sample **t-test** to compare perceptions between accredited and non-accredited universities
- Reliability analysis using **Cronbach's Alpha**

6.9 Ethical Considerations

The study was conducted with ethics in mind. All respondents provided informed consent, and no personal identifiers were collected. These data were purely for academic and research purposes.

7. Data Analysis and Interpretation

Analysis of the data gathered from students attending NAAC-accredited and non-accredited universities was done through coding and analyzing the data in the Statistical Package of Social Sciences (SPSS). The meaning of overall institutional quality was measured using descriptive and inferential statistics to analyze the perception of students. The fixed level of significance was at 0.05. The analysis was then carried out according to a single objective and hypothesis of the study.

Table 1: Demographic Profile of the Respondents (N = 200)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	112	56.0
	Female	88	44.0
Level of Study	Undergraduate	126	63.0

	Postgraduate	74	37.0
Type of University	NAAC-Accredited	100	50.0
	Non-Accredited	100	50.0

Interpretation:

The sample comprises an equal number of respondents from NAAC-accredited and non-accredited universities, ensuring balanced comparison. The demographic distribution reflects adequate representation across gender and level of study, making the data suitable for comparative statistical analysis.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of Overall Student Perception of Quality

University Type	Mean	Standard Deviation
NAAC-Accredited	3.88	0.58
Non-Accredited	3.37	0.66

Interpretation:

The mean score of overall perceived quality is higher among students from NAAC-accredited universities compared to those from non-accredited universities. The relatively low standard deviation values indicate consistency in students' responses within each group. This suggests that accreditation status may influence students' overall perception of institutional quality.

Table 3: Independent Sample t-Test for Overall Student Perception of Quality

University Type	Mean	SD	t-value	p-value
NAAC-Accredited	3.88	0.58	6.12	0.000
Non-Accredited	3.37	0.66		

Interpretation:

The independent sample t-test reveals a statistically significant difference in the overall perception of quality between students of NAAC-accredited and non-accredited universities ($p < 0.05$). Students enrolled in NAAC-accredited universities perceive higher overall institutional quality compared to their counterparts in non-accredited universities.

Hypothesis Testing

H₀₁: There is no significant difference in students' perception of overall quality between NAAC-accredited and non-accredited universities in India.

Based on the results of the independent sample t-test, the null hypothesis (H₀₁) is **rejected**. The findings of the present study provide empirical evidence that NAAC accreditation has a significant influence on students' overall perception of quality in higher education institutions.

Overall Interpretation

The data analysis clearly indicates that NAAC accreditation plays a significant role in shaping students' perceptions of overall institutional quality. The statistically significant difference observed between accredited and non-accredited universities confirms that accreditation-related academic and institutional practices are meaningfully experienced by students. The rejection of the null hypothesis is supported by the empirical findings of the present study, thereby fulfilling the primary objective of this research.

8. Discussion

The present study was undertaken to compare the perceived quality of higher education institutions between NAAC-accredited and non-accredited universities in India from the students' perspective. The findings of the study provide clear empirical evidence that NAAC accreditation has a significant influence on students' overall perception of institutional quality. The independent sample t-test results indicate a statistically significant difference between the two groups, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis (H₀₁).

Students enrolled in NAAC-accredited universities reported higher levels of overall satisfaction with institutional quality when compared to students from non-accredited universities. This difference suggests that accreditation-related mechanisms such as structured academic planning, standardized teaching–learning processes, transparent evaluation systems, and improved institutional governance positively shape students’ educational experiences. These findings reinforce the argument that accreditation is not merely a formal certification process but a quality enhancement mechanism that directly affects the academic environment perceived by students.

The higher overall quality perception among students of accredited universities may also be attributed to the systematic implementation of quality assurance practices mandated by the accreditation framework. NAAC-accredited institutions are required to maintain minimum benchmarks related to curriculum delivery, learning resources, student support systems, and institutional accountability. As a result, students are more likely to associate accredited universities with credibility, reliability, and better academic standards, which enhances their confidence in the quality of education received.

In contrast, comparatively lower perception scores among students from non-accredited universities indicate possible gaps in institutional processes, resource availability, and quality monitoring systems. These deficiencies may negatively influence students’ academic experiences and satisfaction levels. The findings of the present study therefore highlight the importance of accreditation in fostering a culture of quality that is visible and meaningful to students.

Overall, the discussion confirms that the rejection of the null hypothesis (H_{01}) is firmly supported by the empirical evidence generated in this study. The results demonstrate that NAAC accreditation significantly differentiates universities in terms of students’ overall perception of quality, thereby fulfilling the central objective of the research.

9. Conclusion and Implications

The present study examined the impact of NAAC accreditation on students’ perception of overall institutional quality by comparing NAAC-accredited and non-accredited universities in India. The findings conclusively establish that NAAC accreditation has a significant and positive effect on how students perceive the quality of higher education institutions. The statistical analysis revealed a meaningful difference in overall quality perception between the two groups, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis (H_{01}) based on the empirical results of this study.

The results suggest that students view NAAC-accredited universities as more credible, reliable, and quality-oriented compared to non-accredited institutions. Accreditation appears to play a vital role in strengthening institutional practices related to academic delivery, governance, and quality assurance, which are ultimately reflected in students’ overall educational experiences. Thus, NAAC accreditation emerges as an effective mechanism for enhancing student-centered quality in higher education.

From an institutional perspective, the findings imply that universities should actively pursue and sustain NAAC accreditation to improve students’ confidence in institutional quality. Continuous quality enhancement initiatives, rather than one-time compliance for accreditation purposes, are essential to ensure long-term improvements in students’ academic experiences. For policymakers and regulatory bodies, the study underscores the need to expand accreditation coverage and strengthen monitoring mechanisms to ensure consistent quality standards across higher education institutions.

In conclusion, the study reaffirms the critical role of NAAC accreditation in shaping students’ perceptions of overall institutional quality in India. By empirically demonstrating the rejection of the null hypothesis through primary data analysis, the research contributes valuable evidence to the discourse on quality assurance in higher education and supports the continued emphasis on accreditation as a key driver of institutional excellence.

10. Scope for Future Research

While the present study provides empirical evidence on the influence of NAAC accreditation on students’ overall perception of institutional quality in Indian higher education, several avenues remain open for future research. The current investigation was limited to a comparative, cross-sectional design; therefore, future studies may adopt longitudinal research designs to examine changes in students’ perceptions before and after accreditation cycles. Such studies would help in understanding the long-term and dynamic impact of accreditation on institutional quality.

Future research may also expand the sample size and include universities from different regions of India to enhance the generalizability of the findings. Incorporating diverse institutional types such as public, private, and deemed universities could offer deeper insights into how accreditation influences quality perception across varied higher education contexts.

In addition, forthcoming studies may consider integrating the perspectives of other key stakeholders, including faculty members, administrators, and employers, to develop a more comprehensive understanding of institutional quality. A multi-stakeholder approach would complement student-based assessments and strengthen the evaluation of accreditation outcomes.

Methodologically, future research could employ mixed-method approaches by combining quantitative surveys with qualitative techniques such as interviews and focus group discussions. This would enable researchers to explore the underlying reasons behind students' quality perceptions and gain richer insights into how accreditation-related practices are experienced at the ground level.

Finally, comparative studies involving international accreditation frameworks could be undertaken to assess how NAAC accreditation aligns with global quality assurance standards. Such research would contribute to policy formulation and support the continuous improvement of accreditation systems in higher education.

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