

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF MULTIDISCIPLINARY: APPLIED BUSINESS AND EDUCATION RESEARCH

2023, Vol. 4, No. 9, 3180 – 3187

<http://dx.doi.org/10.11594/ijmaber.04.09.10>

Research Article

Perception of Faculty Regarding Proposed New Accreditation Norms by the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC)

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Article history:

Submission September 2023

Revised September 2023

Accepted September 2023

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ABSTRACT

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 underscores the importance of accreditation and introduces the “National Accreditation Council” as its overarching body. The NEP envisions a 15-year phased approach, emphasising graded accreditation and institutional autonomy, aiming for all higher education establishments in India to evolve into self-governing entities focused on innovation and excellence. The National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) has formulated new guidelines, enabling universities and colleges operational for at least one academic year to apply for provisional accreditation. These guidelines intend to widen the scope of accreditation. Unlike the previous requirement that mandated institutions to be at least six years old or to have graduated two student cohorts for NAAC application, the new approach led to a limited number of institutions seeking accreditation due to low application rates. This article examines the viewpoints of 400 faculty members from Higher Educational Institutions in Maharashtra on whether the proposed norms will enhance the quality standards of these institutions. The faculty members collectively believe that the anticipated norms are unlikely to improve the existing quality standards of Higher Educational Institutions significantly.

Keywords: Accreditation, Faculty perspective, NAAC, New Norms

Introduction

Over the past two decades, Indian universities have made significant strides in

establishing robust quality assurance mechanisms, primarily through the accreditation processes conducted by government bodies like

How to cite:

Kumar, A., Gawande, A., Kristiawan, M., Finthariasari, M., Viona, E., Tank, M., Gupta, D. (2023). Perception of Faculty Regarding Proposed New Accreditation Norms by the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC). *International Journal of Multidisciplinary: Applied Business and Education Research*. 4(9), 3180 – 3187. doi: 10.11594/ijmaber.04.09.10

the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) and the National Board of Accreditation. These government agencies employ teams of three to five experts who conduct periodic on-site assessments of colleges and universities every five years. These assessments are guided by a set of standardised criteria, which encompass various crucial dimensions:

- **Curriculum Excellence:** This evaluates the quality and relevance of the academic programs offered by the institution.
- **Teaching-Learning and Assessment:** It scrutinises the effectiveness of teaching methods, learning processes, and assessment practices.
- **Research, Innovation, and Outreach:** This dimension assesses the institution's contributions to research, innovation, and its engagement with the community.
- **Infrastructure and Learning Resources:** The adequacy and quality of physical and technological educational resources are examined.
- **Student Support and Progression:** This area focuses on support services and measures to ensure students' academic progress and overall development.
- **Management, Leadership, and Governance:** It evaluates the institution's administrative practices and the effectiveness of its leadership.
- **Institutional Values and Best Practices:** Ensuring the institution adheres to ethical values and identifying and implementing best practices within its operations.

The assessment indicators are meticulously weighed, and these individual evaluations are then aggregated to compute a Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA) on a four-point scale. The CGPA comprehensively assesses the institution's overall quality and performance. In higher education institutions, the Internal Quality Assurance Cell (IQAC) plays the crucial role of maintaining and enhancing quality. IQAC is an internal university organisation overseeing the institution's quality assurance processes. It serves as the administrator and guardian of the quality assurance system, re-

sponsible for ensuring the institution continually strives for excellence in education and related activities.

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 places great emphasis on accreditation. It has a "meta-accreditation body" called the National Accreditation Council. According to the NEP, through an appropriate system of graduated accreditation and autonomy and in a systematic and phased manner spread over 15 years, all higher education institutes in India shall strive to become independent self-governing institutions striving for innovation and excellence. According to a new set of guidelines drawn up by the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC), universities and colleges that have existed for even one academic year will also be eligible to apply for provisional accreditation. According to the guidelines, the move aims to "broaden the horizon of accreditation". So far, only those colleges that are at least six years old or have graduated at least two batches of students could apply for NAAC accreditation. Given that not many educational institutions use it for review, this rule has resulted in a position where very few of the country's 51,000 colleges, universities and standalone institutions have the NAAC accreditation.

This article presents the perception of 400 faculty members from Higher Educational Institutions in Maharashtra on whether the proposed new norms will improve the quality levels of the Higher Educational Institutions.

Literature Review

In a study by Kumar et al. (2022), the researchers evaluated the long-term quality maintenance of higher education institutions (HEIs) using accreditation scores from two consecutive five-year accreditation cycles, a practice globally recognised as a measure of quality. The primary objective was to uncover the reasons behind the declining quality performance observed in many HEIs. The study encompassed an analysis of 481 Indian HEIs based on their accreditation scores during the 2nd and 3rd assessment cycles by the apex agency, the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC). The study's results were

concerning, as they revealed a decline in performance quality among many HEIs. Specifically, out of the 481 institutions analysed, 320 exhibited a decrease in their accreditation scores, while 161 showed improvements. This trend indicated a worrying decline in the quality of Indian higher education institutions. The study further delved into the matter, identifying potential causes for the lack of sustained quality in Indian HEIs. One of the central issues identified was the insufficient institutionalisation of quality assurance practices within these institutions. The findings underscored that many HEIs had not effectively embedded quality assurance measures into their organisational culture and operations. The study's insights hold implications not only for Indian HEIs but also for higher education institutions worldwide that aspire to maintain ongoing quality assurance. This research is distinctive in addressing the decline in quality among colleges operating within a quality-focused framework for over a decade. The authors caution institutions against becoming complacent with their quality standards, emphasising the importance of proactive efforts to uphold and continually improve quality standards over the long term.

According to Suchanek et al. (2012), the Bologna process initiated a series of reforms in higher education, and in Germany, it was known as the "Bologna Reform." This reform primarily focused on establishing national standards and guidelines that served as the basis for mandatory accreditation of academic programs by external accrediting bodies. The article presents findings from an empirical study that aimed to assess the impact and limitations of certification as a tool for monitoring curriculum reform. The study analysed 1,380 accreditation decisions made in Lower Saxony from July 2004 to December 2009. The researchers interviewed key administrators from 36 state higher education institutions (HEIs). These efforts were undertaken to gain deeper insights into whether accreditation effectively supported the quality assurance objectives of HEIs.

Tran et al. (2011) critically examine the quality standards applied to higher education institutions in Vietnam. These standards were

developed in response to the pressing need for fundamental reforms to improve the quality of education, particularly in teaching and learning. The authors scrutinise the standards and related legislative documents, including the Education Act of 2005 and the National Curriculum Framework, focusing on aspects like the learner-centred approach, constructive alignment theory, and definitions of quality. The paper also draws upon the experiences of the second author, who participated in the initial phase of the Accreditation Program. This insider perspective proves valuable in shedding light on the evaluation criteria outlined in the standard. While the development of these standards has been acknowledged as a positive step towards addressing quality-related concerns in the education sector, the paper raises concerns about the direction these assessment criteria take. Notably, the criteria related to student learning outcomes are not given adequate priority. This omission is significant because the absence of emphasis on student presence and learning, which are integral components of any educational process, may limit the potential for the standard to bring about substantial changes towards a more student-centred approach to teaching and learning. The analysis presented in the paper also invites reflection on the decision-making processes surrounding quality assurance and its practical implementation. The lessons learned from Vietnam's experience with this quality assurance initiative may prove valuable to other countries considering a similar approach.

Stura et al. (2019) discuss the evolution and significant reforms in quality assurance within higher education in recent decades. They specifically highlight the implementation of the AVA (Autovalutazione, Valutazione e Accreditamento) system in Italy 2016, which was utilised to assess the compliance of 118 randomly selected university study programs. The study's main objective was to explore the relationship between the quality performance assessed through AVA and different disciplinary areas. The aim was to gain insights into the underlying "quality mechanism" and determine whether specific academic disciplines tend to excel in quality assurance processes. The study's findings revealed a robust correlation

between technical and engineering degree programs and favourable outcomes in quality assurance assessments. This strong correlation may be attributed to these fields having well-developed expertise in quality management and improvement practices. As a result, the authors recommend establishing professional units within each university comprising individuals with a technical and engineering mindset. These units would oversee and enhance the quality of education and operations within their respective institutions.

Jolly and Mahieu (2016) have stated that everyone seems to be concerned about sustainable development in our society. Still, when we discuss with European students, one realises that not much has been done in many institutions and that, for now, it is always the same European universities that behave as “good” students” and respond to surveys and inquiries; it is necessary to find a way to make things evolve everywhere! Accreditation agencies are one solution to improve the involvement of all higher education institutions. In France, the Commission des Titres d’Ingénieur (CTI) is the regulatory authority responsible for authorising engineering universities to confer the title of “engineer.” The CTI autonomously establishes its accreditation criteria, which can evolve based on its internal deliberations or input from its stakeholders, following the guidelines outlined by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA). Specifically, the CTI engaged in a three-year consultation process with organisations directly impacted by sustainable development on social responsibility and sustainable development. This collaborative effort, which took place over three years, culminated in February 2014 with the definition of specific elements that must be included in the self-evaluation reports submitted by higher education institutions (HEIs) seeking accreditation from the CTI. These defined elements are intended to ensure that HEIs undergoing the accreditation process in France adequately address social responsibility and sustainable development in their educational programs and institutional practices. This aligns with broader efforts to promote responsible and sustainable approaches to engineering education and training within the country.

Jaber and Batsch (2016) have written that quality assurance and accreditation in higher education aim to maintain and increase the quality of education and guarantee the improvement of its standards. It enables the institution to obtain necessary inputs, improve processes and raise the standards of its outputs to meet previously defined goals and needs of stakeholders. In this paper, we delve into the critical topics of accreditation and quality assurance (QA) within the realm of Jordanian higher education institutions, with a primary emphasis on the crucial role of professionalism in accreditation and quality assurance processes. We explore the historical evolution of accreditation and QA procedures, including establishing the Higher Education Accreditation Commission (HEAC) as a central authority overseeing these processes. Additionally, we delve into the specific quality assurance standards and procedures implemented by HEAC and the foundational principles shaping Jordan’s accreditation and quality assurance system. The paper further examines the strategic quality assurance and improvement plans employed by Jordanian universities and highlights their challenges in implementing these measures. Lastly, the paper offers valuable recommendations to enhance the quality assurance practices within Jordanian universities.

Other writers who have written on accreditation include Ordonez and Ordonez (2009), Almarghani and Mijatovic (2017), Crick et al. (2020), Cheng (2015), and Augusti (2005). No research has been found on the proposed new norms of the NAAC; hence, this study endeavours to fill this gap.

Methodology

To draw meaningful inferences and conclusions, a minimum sample size of 100 is recommended (Alreck and Settle, 2003). In line with this guidance, a sample size of 400 was fixed. The convenience sampling method was followed. Around 550 questionnaires were sent to faculty members from different Higher Educational Institutions in Maharashtra. Four hundred responses were received over a month, indicating a response rate of around 72%. Neither the respondent’s name nor the institution was recorded to ensure confidentiality. They

agreed to cooperate only when the respondents were assured of their privacy. A questionnaire was designed in Google Forms. It was divided into the following parts:

- a. Demographic Profile
- b. Perception about new norms leading to improved quality

The questionnaire had the following features:

- a. Responses were sought by way of a selection from a range of options
- b. In seeking agreement or disagreement on a particular issue, the sequence of responses was designed as under- -
 - 0 - No option
 - 1 - Somewhat agree
 - 2 - Completely agree
 - 3 - Somewhat disagree
 - 4 - Completely disagree

“No option” choice was deliberately kept as the 1st response to provide an early exit option to those who either didn’t know the answer or didn’t want to answer. The questionnaire was tested for reliability and returned a Cronbach Alpha score of 0.882 and hence was considered reliable. The questionnaire is given at the end of the article.

The hypothesis set was:

Ho: The new norms will lead to a significant change in the quality levels of the Higher Educational Institutions.

Ha: The new norms will not lead to any significant change in the quality levels of the Higher Educational Institutions.

The hypothesis was tested based on the average agreement/disagreement responses to the ten statements in the questionnaire related to the possibility of improvement in quality due to new norms. The average agreement/disagreement response of the 400 respondents for all the related statements was taken as the sample mean, and it was compared with a hypothesised population mean of 50% agreement/disagreement, connoting an event by chance and not due to any statistical significance. A t-test was applied at a 95% confidence level, and based on the p-value, the null hypothesis was tested for rejection or non-rejection.

Data analysis and interpretation

61% of respondents were male, whereas 39% were female. 24% were from the Northern region of Maharashtra, 27% were from the Eastern region, 34% were from the Western region, and 15% were from the Southern region. 18% of respondents were from Engineering Colleges, 48% were from MBA Colleges, 26% were from Pharmacy colleges, and 8% were from other streams.

The average disagreement responses to the questionnaire were as follows:

Table 1: Summary of responses to the questionnaire

Statement	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Average
Disagreement %	88%	91%	86%	86%	92%	86%	86%	92%	88%	85%	88%

Based on the above summary average sample mean, the hypothesis was tested as follows:

Table 2: Testing of Hypothesis

Parameter	Value
Sample Mean (\bar{x})	88%
Hypothesised population mean (μ)	50%
SD of sample	0.855247
n (sample size)	400
t-value= $abs((\bar{x} - \mu) / (s/\sqrt{n}))$	4.43873
p-value = $tdist(t,(n-1),1)$	0.00001
Decision	Reject Null

Thus, the null hypothesis the new norms will lead to a significant change in quality levels of the Higher Educational Institutions, was rejected in favour of its alternate; the new norms will not lead to any substantial change in quality levels of the Higher Educational Institutions.

Conclusion

The faculty members do not seem to agree that the proposed new norms by the NAAC will bring any perceptible change in the existing quality levels at the Higher Educational Institutions. The main goal of accreditation is the institutionalisation of quality at universities. To accomplish this, the institution, through its Internal Quality Assurance Cell (IQAC), willingly assumes the responsibility for upholding and preserving quality standards. This commitment to quality must arise voluntarily rather than imposed by external forces. Effecting cultural shifts within higher education institutions is crucial to cultivating a profound dedication to quality among all stakeholders, including students. They should question themselves and others about why they would settle for a sub-par education when the country's future rests in their hands. In India alone, no fewer than a billion such individuals contribute to the country's demographic dividend or burden it with a demographic disaster. Maintaining high-quality standards in higher education is imperative to harness the demographic dividend. Regrettably, this is not currently the prevailing reality. We propose fostering more robust communication between accreditation agencies and IQACs within higher education institutions. In instances where IQACs encounter challenges, they should have the opportunity to seek formal assistance from a central agency. Central agencies should establish specialised units to address occasional issues raised by IQACs in accredited colleges. Exploring the notion of having college IQACs functionally affiliated with such specialised units within central agencies might be worthwhile. At the same time, they continue to report to the university's leadership and top management for administrative purposes. Similar organisational arrangements are observed in various functions, such as con-

trol, where business unit controllers functionally report to the central headquarters controller and administratively report to the heads of their respective units (Govindarajan and Anthony, 1998). These specialised units within central agencies could possess the technical and functional expertise needed to evaluate the performance of IQACs effectively.

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APPENDIX

QUESTIONNAIRE		
Faculty perception about the proposed new accreditation norms by the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC)		
PROFILE INFORMATION		
1	Name of the Respondent (optional)	
2	Gender (Male, Female)	
3	Zone (North, East, West, South)	
4	College (Engineering, MBA, Pharmacy, Other)	
I. Perception about proposed new norms		
Rate the following statements on a scale of Cannot Say, Somewhat Agree, Strongly Agree, Somewhat Disagree, Strongly Disagree		
No.	Statement	Response
1	The new norms will improve the quality of further colleges through provisional accreditation.	
2	They will have a positive impact on the teaching-learning environment.	
3	The new norms will have a positive impact on curriculum improvement.	
4	They will improve faculty quality.	
5	They will help in improving institutional infrastructure.	
6	The new norms will have a positive impact on learning outcomes.	
7	They will positively impact the research environment.	
8	They will reduce false quality claims by institutions.	
9	The new norms will improve overall student satisfaction.	
10	The new norms will positively impact governance, leadership, and management.	