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**Table of Contents**

# THE IMPACT OF ACCREDITATION IN MAINTAINING EDUCATIONAL STANDARDS IN HIGHER EDUCATION: A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

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**Abstract**
*Accreditation helps ensure strong educational standards in higher education. The article reviews the role accreditation plays in assuring quality, examining examples from both U.S. Middle States Commission-based regions and the NAAC in India, as well as from the transnational Bologna Process. Although, accreditation helps ensure the curriculum, faculty experience, and good operation of institutions, there have also been challenges regarding bureaucratic inefficiencies, high expenses, and resistance to innovation—all these can diminish the effectiveness of accreditation. The study points out that accreditation is being altered by the spread of digital technology, the use of competency-based programs, and the addition of ESG criteria. Artificial intelligence is changing accreditation using prediction and review of compliance, yet concerns about data and bias still exist. Embracing new approaches, while staying open and including others, ensures accreditation maintains quality standards and helps higher education institutions grow around the world.*

**Keywords:** Accreditation, Educational standards, Higher education, U.S. Middle States Commission, The NAAC

## Introduction

Accreditation has become an essential quality assurance instrument in higher learning, not just as gatekeeping for academic rigor but also as a force for institutional growth (Iqbal et al., 2023). Globally accredited as recognition of educational quality, accreditation processes measure institutions of learning by setting benchmarks to satisfy students' and employers' expectations and society at large (Duarte & Vardasca, 2023). Even though the core aim of accreditation never changes - unifying and improving educational standards, its form is radically diverse in national contexts, because of diverse philosophies relating to

education, governance, and economics. Unsuccessful accreditation systems can have devastating outcomes, as shown by Germany's higher education crisis in the late 20th century. Comparative studies showed that German students took longer to graduate in comparison to their European counterparts, which was attributed to a lack of appropriate quality assurance mechanisms (Duarte & Vardasca, 2023). This historical case shows the importance of accreditation not only as a guarantee of institutional responsibility but also as a driving force for the best efficiency for education under analysis.

Developed accreditation systems like the UK Research Excellence Framework (REF) and Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) make use of updated, multi-dimensional evaluation criteria to ensure premium quality along with transparency. Government-sanctioned reforms in China have helped institutions to achieve autonomy and implement innovative practices by employing accreditation, which is mostly seen in STEM disciplines (Duarte & Vardasca, 2023). The National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) of India is known to be one such instrumental body working on a mission to uplift institutions and bring them up to the level of international standards by keeping a regular check on the disparities existing in the higher education sector. These highlight the two prime roles of accreditation - one as a benchmark of quality and another as a policy instrument for national educational development.

Research made in 10 countries shows that established institutions sail through accreditation comparatively easily, whereas, newcomers face excessive obstacles – an alarming trend in a time calling for innovation in the field of education (Duarte & Vardasca, 2023). The emergence of non-traditional education providers and digital instruments of learning brings new complexities to more traditional models of accreditation.

This article studies the changing role of accreditation in the sustenance and uplifting of the standards of higher education in the world. Comparative analysis of different accreditation models and the consequences of such practices on institutional performance seeks to identify best practices in the form of reforms for improved efficiency, relevancy, and equity of the quality assurance systems in an ever more complex educational setup.

**Historical Evolution of Accreditation in Higher Education**

The idea of accreditation at the higher education level started in the late 19th and early 20th centuries in America as a way for reputable institutions to separate themselves from diploma mills (Kelchen, 2017). At first, a voluntary peer-review process, accreditation became a matter of federal significance in 1944 as the GI Bill brought in the idea of quality assurance measures for the prevention of exploitation of veterans by substandard institutions. Early emphasis on accreditation was on structural inputs – mission alignment, governance, financial stability, and academic resources – changed over time in the 80s to look at student learning outcomes, albeit with limited standardization (Kelchen, 2017).

At a global scale, the evolution of accreditation systems followed on from colonial influences and global reforms. The Bologna Process (1999), Europe's breakthrough harmonization drive, went far beyond former colonial outposts, redefining degrees, credit transfer, and quality checking norms beyond the continent (Mngo, 2021). Although the U.S. system did not welcome direct appropriation, it was losing out to the students' movement across borders and transnational education partnerships, which were forcing accreditors to consider global compatibility (Mngo, 2021).

The 21st century brings new challenges where geometric disruption and borderless education are involved. The need to embrace online learning, micro-credentials, and transnational campuses has called for a paradigm shift from the input-based to outcomes-oriented accreditation (Manimala et al., 2020). Conventional levels such as faculty qualifications and infrastructure were no longer enough; accreditors are now focusing on competence-based learning and preparedness of graduates for the workforce and recognition of international credits (Manimala et al., 2020).

**Types of Accreditation and Accreditation Bodies**

Higher education accreditation is an important quality assurance vehicle that works through different models with different scopes and jurisdictions. There are two distinct types of accreditations, which are institutional and programmatic accreditation. Institutional accreditation is an assessment of quality for whole universities about broad systems of governance, faculty qualifications, and student support services to

promote whole institutional quality (Blanchette, 2024). Whereas, programmatic accreditation targets a particular field of studies and usually coincides with professional licensure needs. For example, business schools can seek accreditation from AACSB, whereas the engineering programs can follow ABET certification to comply with the industry (CHEA, 2022). Many institutions have several accreditations held at the same time, combining an institutional validation with approval of certain programs to make institutions more credible and give students more opportunities.

The accreditation agencies operate at three levels, namely regional, national, and international, with various functions. In the United States, regional accreditors like the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) evaluate institutions in specified geographical regions with a focus on mission-oriented educational quality (Blanchette, 2024). National bodies such as India's National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) and Australia's Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) require country-specific standards, normally under government control for uniformity and accountability (Nguyen et al., 2021). In the international sphere, there are organisations such as the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) whose aim is to standardise quality across countries, thus promoting student movement and credit migration, like through the initiatives such as the Bologna Process (Salto, 2021).

The international trend to standardize accreditation has picked up steam with such efforts as the UNESCO Global Convention on Higher Education Recognition (2019), which propagates fair qualification recognition in more than 100 countries, especially non-traditional and refugee learners (UNESCO, 2023). In the same vein, the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE) connects over 200 agencies to promote networking to respond to the emerging challenges, such as transnational education and digital credentialing (Nguyen et al., 2021).

The accreditation field reflects a struggle between local relevance and global integration. Although decentralized setups such as those in the U.S. permit flexibility, centralized systems such as that in the High Council for Evaluation of Research and Higher Education (HCERES), France, give priority to uniformity (Salto, 2021). At the same

time, countries such as Vietnam combine the influences of the Western and Asian systems. They incorporate ASEAN University Network-Quality Assurance (AUN-QA) standards to follow the regional indicators (Nguyen et al., 2021). With time, accreditation agencies continue to redirect their focus from the conventional input measurements to the results, e.g., graduate employability, learning competencies, to keep them aligned in ever-changing academic and labour realities.

**Role of Accreditation in Maintaining Educational Standards**

In higher education, accreditation helps to maintain and raise the quality of education in institutions around the world. The existence of tough evaluation frameworks through accreditation ensures that institutions maintain standards and grow further in curriculum, teachers, and university administration. Not only is this process focused on quality, but it also helps create a culture of excellence that supports students, faculty, and society (Adiatma et al., 2022).

A major advantage of accreditation is that schools are regularly guided in developing their curriculum. Accreditation organizations make sure that programs in schools answer the needs of employers, cover new fields, and use efficient educational practices (Jafarov, 2024). As a result of an accreditation review, the University of São Paulo restructured its engineering program to focus on group projects and connections to companies. Due to these changes, the employability of its graduates increased (Adiatma et al., 2022).

The qualifications of faculty members are heavily studied during the accreditation process. Most accrediting agencies ask for several instructors to have a doctorate in their field and to keep updating their skills (Jafarov, 2024). A key element of accreditation, peer review, assesses the abilities of a teacher and the outcomes of their research. This situation is shown clearly at the University of Cape Town. After there were differences between how supportive the faculty were, the university introduced a planned program that helped the staff develop their teaching and research further (UCT, 2023).

Accreditation ensures that all institutions have at least the minimum educational expectations. Agencies such as TEQSA make sure to examine all aspects of learning for students and the ways in which a school is managed and governed (Jafarov, 2024). These points guarantee that all certified schools are of a definite quality, no matter

their focus or size. The ESG helps by promoting similar approaches and practices across Europe, allowing students to travel and making it easier for universities to work and cooperate (Adiatma et al., 2022).

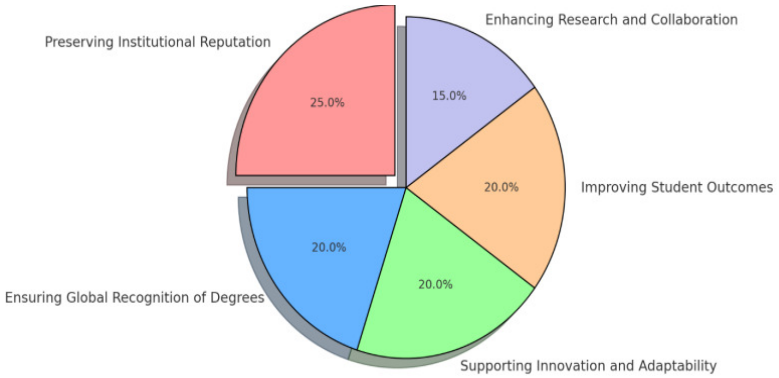


**Figure 1: Importance of Accreditation and Quality Assurance in Higher Education**
**(Source: Jafarov, 2024)**

Figure 1 proves that the major advantages of accreditation are reputation at the institute (25%), global recognition of degrees (20%), and support for new approaches (20%), in the opinion of Jafarov (2024). Even though there are problems with bureaucracy, accreditation is vital for ensuring and enhancing education standards. To face the latest challenges in higher education, accreditation across the world is being improved and adapted to new learning methods.

Accreditation has a greater influence on a university, helping it to transform and improve meaningfully. In particular, the National University of Singapore's business school decided to use AACSB accreditation to introduce data analytics into most of its courses and enhance the abilities of its graduates (Jafarov, 2024). After receiving accreditation recommendations, the University of Barcelona decreased the number of withdrawals by 15% (Adiatma et al., 2022). They indicate that accreditation helps in quality control and also supports future improvements in education.

**Global Case Studies**

**United States: Regional Accreditation Impact**

The study of Ríos et al. (2022) proves that the regional accreditation system in the U.S. has clear quality assurance effects on architecture programs. 85% of students and 72% of faculty believe that having accreditation has a significantly positive effect, helping to improve the school's curriculum topics and the quality of teaching, as shown in Figure 2.

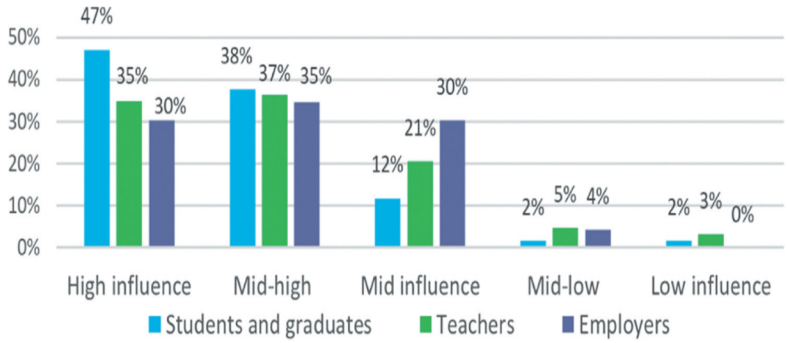


**Figure 2: Accreditation influence on quality education (Source: Ríos et al. 2022)**

The study found that many faculty indicated students are doing better in their studies after the program was accredited. Working with national standards has led to better course alignment in 37% of the cases, and 22% reported using new forms of assessments like rubrics and portfolios. Despite the positive outcomes, the survey found several hurdles with implementation, including stress from increased student work (reported by 35% of teachers) and adapting to new course requirements being difficult for some teachers (21%). Research shows that accreditation aims to promote improvements in quality but can also place more demands on how services are delivered. Its success is partly owed to focusing on different stakeholders and consistently maintaining good education quality in higher education.

**India: NAAC's Institutional Benchmarking**

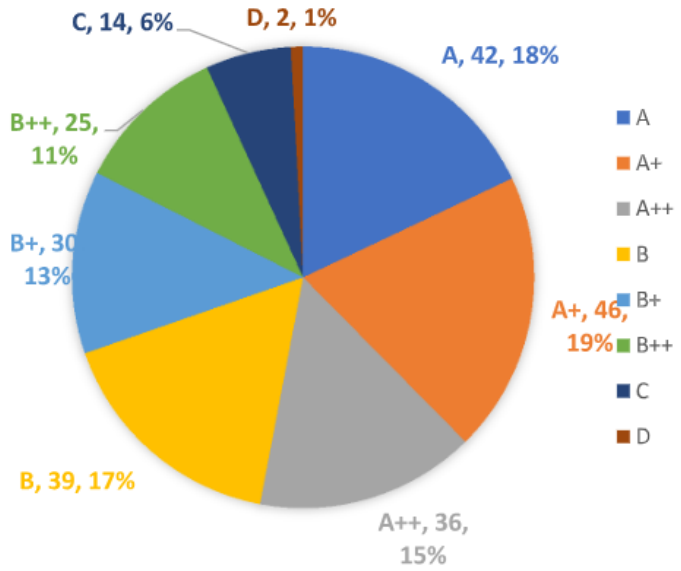


**Figure 3: Distribution of Universities in India by Performance Grade**
**Source: Singh et al. (2025)**

The open method of grading implemented by the NAAC in India has made a significant difference in quality assurance, as shown in Figure 3. Studying the data reveals that 52.6% of universities have achieved either an 'A' or higher, and only 0.85% have been rated as 'D,' which proves the system helps to raise academic standards (Singh et al. 2025). Gautam (2024), points out that NAAC blends minimum prerequisites for colleges (having operated for six years with two batches of graduates) with the use of technology in assessing institutions. The model has managed to reduce paperwork and still maintain strict quality. On the other hand, it is still an issue to find ways to help poorly performing institutions, among them the ones in the 16.5% ranked by 'B++' and 'C' standards (Singh et al. 2025). NAAC demonstrates how nations facing fast growth in higher education can put in place strong accreditation systems that ensure both quality and growth.

**UK: QAA and Post-Brexit Challenges**

Following Brexit, there have been major changes in the UK's Quality Assurance Agency's engagement with European higher education frameworks. Corbett and Hantrais (2023) explain that British contributions to EU development, including the Bologna Process and Horizon Europe policy, were replaced by more market-focused international policies once the UK left the EU. For example, since the UK is not part of Erasmus+, it has led to fewer opportunities for students and institutions to find partnerships. Yet, the QAA keeps in step with European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) to protect its worldwide recognition, while placing greater value on each nation's autonomy and competition.

**Africa: Progress and Persistent Challenges**

In Ghana and South Africa, higher education is challenged by inadequate funds and not meeting what employees need. According to Mbithi et al. (2021), despite more students entering schools during the pandemic, colleges struggled with crowding, outdated classes, and weak links to the industry. As an example, just 30% of universities in Africa use formal accreditation processes, making it hard for their degrees to be accepted outside the continent. South Africa's Council on Higher Education has done well with quality audits, whereas Ghana's National Accreditation Board still has some capacity issues. Academic programs and curricula in Africa should pay more attention to sustainability and digital topics to meet the goals of SDG 4.

**Asia: Japan's Quality Enhancement Initiatives**

The National Institution for Academic Degrees and Quality Enhancement in Japan promotes micro-credentials and programs that are relevant to the industry. Pawilen (2024), explains how the 2009 Quality Assurance Framework in Japan established strict standards for short-term education and supports learning across a lifetime. For example, by working together, universities from Japan and the Philippines have designed and validated micro-credentials on AI and green technology. It fills skills gaps but faces difficulties in spreading widely across the region.

**International Collaborations: Erasmus+ and Beyond**

Initiatives like Erasmus+ and the African Union's Harmonization Strategy are aimed at ensuring that education quality is kept high across countries. Jakubakynov et al. (2024) note that Kazakhstan-Ukraine universities collaborate through digital means for joint degrees, but some difficulties, such as shortages of funding and teaching staff, are present. Despite the UNESCO Global Convention, recognition of qualifications remains unequal because Europe has an established ESG approach, whereas most African systems are just developing (UNESCO, 2023). While there are positive effects from cooperative action, a lack of equal resources and different strictness across countries keeps the final goal of overall uniformity from being achieved. They underline the value of putting in place flexible models for accreditation, which match global expectations with the capabilities of different regions to give equal opportunities for quality higher education to all.

**Challenges and Criticisms of Accreditation**

Accreditation is an important tool to maintain quality in higher education, but it also has several important issues that need careful study. One of the main difficulties is that institutions must cope with too much bureaucracy (Jafarov, 2024). During accreditation, documents such as rigorous self-assessments, plenty of data on the institution, and evidence that all requirements are met are usually required. This is because many faculty and staff are often required to spend a lot of extra time and effort on paperwork, which could be better used for teaching, planning courses, or doing research. To deal with accreditation, many schools dedicate teams that prevent resources from being used on the main educational mission. Dealing with lots of paperwork can result in constant fatigue for people involved with the accreditation process.

There is also a big challenge of a lack of standardization across accrediting bodies (Jafarov, 2024). While the idea behind accreditation is to use the same standards, agencies in practice often have their ways of evaluating programs. This inconsistency makes it harder for institutions that work in different countries or that want to be recognized by others around the world. Transnational universities, for example, must meet rules from more than one country at the same time, which can create mixed requirements and make staying in

compliance more expensive (Sia & Jimmie, 2023). Since there are no widely accepted standards for accreditation, both students and employers might not understand clearly how much it shows about an institution's educational standards. Due to this variability, institutions in regions with less-developed quality assurance may be at a disadvantage.

Most critically, traditional ways of school accreditation often push back against trying new ways of teaching and learning in schools (Jafarov, 2024). Many accrediting agencies have rules and systems that are more suited to regular, in-person education, which can make it hard for online and mixed-learning programs to get the needed approvals. Emerging educational approaches like things like competency-based education, micro-credentials, and stackable degree programs often get looked at much more closely than regular programs do. This institutional stick-to-the-rules attitude can make teachers reluctant to try out new ways of teaching and can slow down the introduction of methods that might help students learn better. For example, even though a lot of online education is now common, many guidelines still focus on things like having buildings and in-person interaction, which don't fit well with learning on the internet. The resulting lag in keeping up with educational changes makes accreditation systems to fall out of step with how higher education is changing.

**Future Trends and Innovations in Accreditation**

**1. Global Standardization of Accreditation Frameworks**

A growing number of efforts are underway in the higher education sector to achieve worldwide accreditation standards in response to the multiplicity of issues facing globalization (Jafarov, 2024). The Bologna Process in Europe is a prime example of how countries work together to align their degree programs and quality assurance structures, leading to easier academic exchange and wider acceptance of international degrees. This evolution becomes especially important for transnational education, where institutions face a complex and frequently conflicting array of accrediting bodies. A single global framework would simplify adherence to standards, cut down on administrative work, and improve comparability of educational quality by nation. Many obstacles must

still be overcome, such as divergent national regulations, diverse cultural norms, and hostility from entrenched accreditors on the world stage. A lack of coordination may prevent implementing standardized processes that all institutions would use, forcing them to operate within a patchwork of different frameworks.

**2. Digital Transformation and Online Learning Accreditation**

The rapid shift to online and hybrid education has compelled accreditors to redefine their standard approaches to assessment. As online learning expands, accrediting organizations need to establish novel requirements for evaluating digital teaching methods, learner interaction, and educational technology (Jafarov, 2024). Virtual labs, AR/VR simulations, and blockchain-based credentialing are transforming how we evaluate learning results. Many accreditors are stuck using outdated standards based mainly on traditional bricks-and-mortar facilities, which hinders the future growth of adaptive learning programs. The accreditation process needs to evolve to adapt to the changing needs of digital education.

**3. Competency-Based Education (CBE) and Skills Accreditation**

Many higher education institutions are transitioning to competency-based education (CBE) models where advancement in a program is based on competency exhibited rather than the accumulation of credit hours (Aithal & Maiya, 2023). As a result, accrediting bodies have updated their criteria to accept alternative achievements such as micro-credentials, digital badges, and stackable qualifications as evidence of learning. As a result, programs such as coding bootcamps and technical certifications are receiving increasing recognition and accreditation, bridging the divide between educational and professional outcomes. At the same time, some traditional universities have been slow to embrace changes that deviate from the traditional system of higher education. To keep up with this change, accreditation systems need to ensure a balance between traditional academic standards and new forms of curriculum delivery to certify increasingly skills-based credentials.

**4. Sustainability and Social Responsibility in Accreditation**

Accreditors are increasing ESG requirements as part of their evaluation processes (Jafarov, 2024). Schools are now evaluated based on how they implement and progress on environmental, social, and governance practices. Accreditors increasingly refer to the SDGs, leading universities to reinvent curricula that incorporate solutions for urgent challenges such as climate change and social inequity. Evaluating a university's success in ESG remains tough, as ESG achievements frequently arise from complex and extended developments. The field is actively working to establish measurable benchmarks that assess sustainability performance accurately and maintain the highest standards of accreditation in today's world. This development shows that higher education is increasingly taking on a role in cultivating ethical leadership and promoting sustainable development.

**5. AI and Data-Driven Accreditation Processes**

Artificial intelligence is transforming accreditation procedures by enabling predictive analysis, automating the evaluation of compliance, and assessing quality in real time (Aithal & Maiya, 2023). Leading AI technologies make it possible to thoroughly examine numerous educational metrics and highlight potentially dangerous programmatic issues, measure student learning achievement, and predict future shifts in higher education. Machine learning is demonstrating remarkable capability to analyse students' progress, estimate faculty research output, and predict graduates' future achievements. At the same time, questions about data privacy and the possibility of discriminatory decision-making by AI tools have emerged as top ethical concerns. Accreditation organizations should focus more of developing comprehensive oversight systems to ensure that AI applications promote transparency, fairness, and accountability in assuring academic excellence.

**Conclusion and Recommendations**

Accreditation helps guarantee the standard of education provided by educational institutions while also motivating continuous development to achieve excellence in the field. The study has effectively shown the major influence of accreditation on higher education across the globe. Many accreditation systems are studied to identify shared ambitions

for raising the bar in higher education. Accreditation will need to address problems like bureaucracy, cost, and resistance to transformation if it is to improve its effectiveness and benefit more colleges and universities. The accreditation of higher education institutions must evolve to match the innovation brought by digital, competency-based, and sustainable forms of education. Promoting digitalization for efficiency, international cooperation to eliminate obstacles linked to education, and adapting approaches to innovation are the latest guidelines. Trustworthiness and equality in the representation of affected parties must underpin the actions of accreditation organizations, so that their assessments consider outcomes consistently for each institution. Ensuring that accreditation is available to diverse types of educational organizations is a top priority for accrediting agencies working in disadvantaged areas.

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