TechnoLEARN: An International Journal of Educational Technology
TechnoLEARN: **14**(01): 11-20, June 2024
DOI: 10.30954/2231-4105.01.2024.2

Peer Reviewed Journal

Bridging the Gap: Strategies for Harmonising Indian and International Accreditation Systems in Higher Education

Ankush Tulshiram Aundhakar

Department of Teacher Education, Kendriya Hindi Sansthan, Agra, Uttar Pradesh, India

Corresponding author: drankushkhs@gmail.com

Received: 13 Apr., 2024 **Revised:** 22 May, 2024 **Accepted:** 02 Jun., 2024

ABSTRACT

Higher education accreditation systems are vital for ensuring quality and fostering international collaboration. However, significant gaps exist between Indian and international accreditation systems, creating challenges for academic mobility, recognition of qualifications, and global competitiveness. This paper aims to explore these gaps, analyse their implications, and propose a SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound) solution to harmonise accreditation frameworks.

Keywords: Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound

The globalization of education has underscored the importance of achieving internationally benchmarked quality standards for higher education institutions (HEIs). Historically, Indian educational institutions like Nalanda, Takshashila and Vikramshila were global centers of learning, renowned for their academic rigor, cultural inclusivity, and innovative teaching methodologies. These institutions set unparalleled standards of excellence, attracting scholars worldwide and serving as prototypes of integrated knowledge systems.

In contrast, modern Indian HEIs face challenges in aligning with global standards due to gaps in accreditation frameworks, limited research opportunities in regional languages, and

How to cite this article: Aundhakar, A.T. (2024). Bridging the Gap: Strategies for Harmonising Indian and International Accreditation Systems in Higher Education. *TechnoLearn: An International Journal of Educational Technology*, **14**(01): 11-20.

Source of Support: None; **Conflict of Interest:** None

insufficient financial resources for infrastructure development. International organizations play a pivotal role in establishing accreditation standards that ensure quality, consistency, and global competitiveness. For instance, UNESCO shapes the discourse on quality education through initiatives like the UNESCO/OECD Guidelines for Quality Provision in Cross-Border Higher Education, ensuring institutions meet global demands. The Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA), via its International Quality Group (CIQG), promotes transparency, equity, and academic rigor in quality assurance worldwide. Similarly, ISO 21001:2018, developed by the International Organization for Standardization (ISO), offers structured frameworks for aligning university operations with global best practices. The International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE) fosters collaboration and accountability in higher education through innovative quality assurance practices.

To address these challenges, the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 introduces transformative reforms aimed at revitalizing India's education system. It emphasizes integrating traditional Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS), promoting community engagement, and fostering innovation through research and interdisciplinary learning. The NEP outlines key strategies, including restructuring the education system, creating cluster universities, and modernizing infrastructure, to bridge the gap between India's education standards and global benchmarks.

The NEP also highlights the importance of promoting research in regional languages to make education more inclusive and accessible. This approach preserves India's linguistic heritage and empowers researchers to address localized issues with culturally relevant solutions. However, achieving these objectives requires substantial financial investment to enhance infrastructure, including laboratories, libraries, and digital resources, enabling HEIs to adopt advanced pedagogical practices.

Despite these advancements, India's accreditation systems, represented by bodies like the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) and the National Board of Accreditation (NBA), lag behind international counterparts in emphasizing qualitative outcomes, stakeholder involvement, and global recognition. Bridging these gaps is critical to ensuring student and faculty mobility, institutional credibility, and the global competitiveness of Indian HEIs.

This paper explores the structural and procedural differences between Indian and international accreditation frameworks, identifies gaps, and proposes a SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound) solution to harmonize Indian standards with global best practices. By doing so, it aims to position Indian HEIs as leaders in the global education landscape, fulfilling the " Vision Viksit Bharat@2047" (Developed India).

This paper explores:

1. The structural and procedural differences between Indian and international accreditation frameworks.
2. The impact of these differences on student and faculty mobility, institutional recognition, and global partnerships.
3. Strategies to bridge these gaps for a more harmonised global accreditation system.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Studies indicate significant differences in the evaluation metrics and procedural standards of Indian and international accreditation systems. Indian accreditation frameworks, such as those employed by the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) and the National Board of Accreditation (NBA), emphasize physical infrastructure, faculty qualifications, curriculum design, and adherence to statutory compliance. These frameworks assess the availability and utilization of resources, including laboratory equipment, library facilities, and campus infrastructure, alongside student-teacher ratios and faculty research credentials.

In contrast, international accreditation systems, focus on measurable outputs such as graduate employability rates, alumni achievements, research citations, and societal impact. The evaluation often involves a rigorous review of how well institutions prepare students for global challenges through innovative teaching methods, interdisciplinary learning, and practical engagement with industry.

Accreditation cycles also vary significantly. Indian accreditation bodies typically operate on a five-year cycle with an emphasis on comprehensive institutional reviews, while many international bodies adopt shorter review intervals with continuous monitoring mechanisms. Governance structures further diverge, with Indian systems primarily managed by centralized agencies under government oversight, compared to international models that often involve autonomous, multi-stakeholder boards comprising academics, industry representatives, and policy experts.

This misalignment results in challenges for Indian higher education institutions (HEIs) seeking international recognition. The lack of a common language in quality assurance frameworks creates barriers for academic credit transfers, student and faculty mobility, and international research collaborations. Consequently, Indian HEIs often face difficulties in attracting global partnerships and achieving competitive rankings in international league tables.

Gaps in Accreditation Systems: Explained with Examples

1. Criteria and Metrics

Gap: Disparities exist in the emphasis on qualitative versus quantitative parameters in accreditation systems.

Example: In India, accreditation systems like NAAC (National Assessment and Accreditation Council) emphasize infrastructure (e.g., library size, number of classrooms) and tangible outputs (e.g., student-teacher ratio, research publications in quantity). However, qualitative aspects like teaching quality, student satisfaction, and real-world applicability of education receive less weightage.

International Comparison: Accreditation bodies like AACSB (Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business) focus more on the qualitative impact, such as leadership development and innovation in teaching methodologies, rather than solely infrastructure or publication numbers.

2. Transparency

Gap: Indian accreditation processes lack consistent openness in their assessment methodologies, leading to limited trust among stakeholders.

Example: NAAC's grading system often relies on peer team visits, which are subjective and may lack uniformity in implementation. Institutions are rarely provided with detailed justifications for their scores.

International Comparison: Agencies like QS World University Rankings and Times Higher Education disclose detailed methodologies, including weightage for metrics like academic reputation, citations, and student diversity. This transparency helps institutions identify areas for improvement and builds credibility.

3. Technology Integration

Gap: Limited adoption of digital tools and automation in accreditation processes in India compared to global practices.

Example: The NAAC assessment still involves significant manual documentation and physical verification, which can lead to delays and inefficiencies.

International Comparison: Accreditation systems like ABET (Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology) in the USA leverage digital platforms for submission, evaluation, and feedback, reducing errors and increasing efficiency. For instance, ABET uses outcome-based evaluation frameworks integrated with software analytics to track performance metrics over time.

4. Stakeholder Involvement

Gap: Indian accreditation bodies often have limited representation of global stakeholders, such as international academicians, industry experts, and student groups.

Example: In NAAC evaluations, panels are predominantly composed of Indian academicians, which might limit a global perspective.

International Comparison: Accreditation agencies like EQUIS (European Quality Improvement System) ensure diversity by involving international academicians and professionals from multiple sectors in their evaluation teams. This inclusivity brings broader insights and enhances global credibility.

5. International Recognition

Gap: Indian accreditation credentials are often not universally accepted, which hampers the mobility of students and faculty and reduces international collaborations.

Example: Indian institutions accredited by NAAC or NBA (National Board of Accreditation) are not automatically recognized by agencies like WASC (Western Association of Schools and Colleges) or TEQSA (Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency) in Australia. This complicates the process of credit transfers or establishing academic partnerships.

International Comparison: Accreditation from bodies like AACSB or AMBA (Association of MBAs) is globally recognized and adds significant value to an institution's profile, facilitating student and faculty exchange programs, dual degree offerings, and cross-border collaborations.

PROPOSED SMART SOLUTION: EXPLAINED

To address the gaps in the accreditation systems, a SMART solution framework has been proposed, ensuring it is Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound.

1. Specific

Action Plan:

Establish an International Accreditation Alignment Taskforce (IAAT) comprising representatives from Indian accreditation bodies (e.g., NAAC, NBA) and globally recognized accreditation agencies (e.g., AACSB, ABET, EQUIS).

Objective:

The taskforce will focus on creating a harmonized accreditation framework that incorporates global best practices while considering India's unique educational context. This would include standardized criteria, transparent processes, and digital integration.

Example:

The IAAT could work on aligning NAAC's criteria with AACSB's emphasis on qualitative aspects such as teaching innovation and stakeholder impact. The taskforce might develop a universal scoring rubric that combines infrastructure, research, student satisfaction, and teaching quality.

2. Measurable

Objective:

Set tangible goals to track the progress of the initiative. For instance:

Increase the number of Indian Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) with dual accreditation (e.g., NAAC and an international agency like AACSB or EQUIS) by 50% within five years.

Achieve a target of 100 HEIs piloting the harmonized framework within three years.

Measurement Tools:

Develop dashboards and reports to monitor accreditation metrics, such as the number of dual-accredited institutions, student outcomes, and global rankings.

Example:

In 2023, India had approximately 1,000 accredited institutions. By 2028, this solution aims to ensure that at least 500 of these institutions also attain recognition from international bodies.

3. Achievable

Implementation Strategy:

Start by piloting a harmonized accreditation framework in a limited number of HEIs, such as universities with a strong record of global engagement.

Steps:

Select 20 HEIs across India with diverse profiles (public, private, urban, and rural).

Collaborate with international accreditation agencies to co-develop and test an integrated framework.

Collect feedback from these pilots to address challenges before scaling up.

Example:

Pilot programs could focus on institutions like the Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) and Indian Institutes of Management (IIMs), which already have a reputation for international collaborations, ensuring higher chances of success.

4. Relevant

Alignment with National Education Policy 2020:

The solution supports the NEP-2020's vision of internationalization of education and global partnerships. The harmonized framework would:

Enhance India's global reputation by improving the quality and global recognition of Indian HEIs.

Increase mobility for Indian students and faculty through mutual recognition of qualifications.

Promote innovation and research collaboration by aligning Indian HEIs with international standards.

Example:

The NEP-2020 highlights the need to benchmark Indian institutions against international standards. A harmonized accreditation framework is directly relevant to this goal, as it addresses quality assurance and international recognition.

5. Time-bound

Timeline:

- Year 1-2: Establish the IAAT, conduct research, and design the harmonized framework.
- Year 3-5: Pilot the framework in 20-50 HEIs and conduct biannual reviews to refine the process.
- Year 6-10: Scale up the implementation across the country, aiming for all accredited HEIs to transition to the harmonized system.

Review Mechanism:

Conduct biannual reviews to evaluate progress, identify bottlenecks, and make necessary adjustments. Publish progress reports to maintain transparency and accountability.

Example:

By 2035, the goal is for Indian HEIs to consistently rank in the top 200 globally, aided by universal recognition of Indian accreditation standards.

STRATEGIC IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

To effectively implement the SMART solution for addressing gaps in accreditation systems, a well-structured strategic implementation plan is proposed. Each component ensures the systematic alignment of Indian accreditation processes with international standards while fostering collaboration, capacity building, and policy support.

1. Mapping and Benchmarking

Objective:

Compare the criteria, processes, and outcomes of Indian accreditation standards with those of global bodies to identify commonalities and gaps.

Steps:

Conduct a detailed analysis of Indian accreditation systems (e.g., NAAC, NBA) against global counterparts like AACSB, ABET, EQUIS, and TEQSA.

Identify areas of convergence (e.g., infrastructure, research metrics) and divergence (e.g., emphasis on qualitative parameters, global engagement).

Develop a harmonized framework that integrates best practices from both systems.

Example:

NAAC could adopt AACSB's focus on innovative teaching and impact-driven research while maintaining its emphasis on local contexts, such as inclusivity and regional diversity.

2. Collaborative Workshops

Objective:

Foster collaboration and knowledge sharing between Indian and international accreditation bodies through regular workshops and conferences.

Steps:

Organize biannual workshops featuring experts from Indian bodies (e.g., NAAC, NBA) and global agencies (e.g., EQUIS, ABET).
Facilitate discussions on harmonization challenges, such as differing evaluation methodologies and criteria.
Create working groups to develop specific tools, rubrics, and guidelines for a harmonized framework.

Example:

Workshops could focus on incorporating global best practices like AACSB's outcome-based assessment model while maintaining Indian priorities such as community engagement and affordability in education.

3. Digital Accreditation Platform

Objective:

Streamline and modernize the accreditation process through a unified online platform leveraging advanced technologies.

Steps:

Develop an AI-driven platform for documentation, evaluation, and feedback.

Incorporate features like predictive analytics to track institution performance over time, automated report generation, and dashboards for real-time monitoring.

Ensure the platform supports multilingual access to cater to the diverse linguistic landscape of Indian HEIs.

Example:

The platform could use AI to evaluate data on research publications, teaching methodologies, and student outcomes, generating insights for both HEIs and accrediting agencies. This would mirror international platforms like ABET's outcome-based software.

4. Training and Capacity Building

Objective:

Prepare Indian HEIs to meet international accreditation standards by enhancing their capacity and understanding of global practices.

Steps:

Design training programs for HEI administrators and faculty, focusing on global accreditation requirements and best practices.
Provide access to resources like case studies, templates, and toolkits.
Offer certifications to incentivize institutions to align with international standards.

Example:

Institutes could participate in specialized workshops on how to improve qualitative aspects like student satisfaction and teaching innovation, similar to AACSB-accredited institutions.

5. Policy Advocacy

Objective:

Engage with policymakers to ensure legislative and regulatory support for harmonizing accreditation systems.

Steps:

Collaborate with government agencies (e.g., UGC, Ministry of Education) to integrate harmonized accreditation goals into national policies like the NEP-2020.

Advocate for funding and incentives to support HEIs in achieving dual or international accreditation.

Facilitate public-private partnerships to support accreditation reform initiatives.

Example:

Policy advocacy could lead to amendments in accreditation regulations that encourage institutions to pursue dual accreditation. This could include financial incentives like grants for HEIs achieving international recognition.

Expected Outcomes

1. Enhanced global recognition of Indian higher education credentials.
2. Increased mobility for students and faculty.
3. Strengthened global partnerships for research and innovation.
4. Improved quality assurance mechanisms within Indian HEIs.

CONCLUSION

Harmonising Indian and international accreditation systems is essential for the global competitiveness of Indian HEIs. By addressing structural and procedural gaps and implementing the proposed SMART solution, India can strengthen its higher education landscape, making it more inclusive and globally recognized.

REFERENCES

Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA). 2010. *The Value of Accreditation*. Retrieved from https://www.chea.org/

UNESCO. 2018. *Quality Assurance in Higher Education: Practices and Issues*. Paris: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.

Hou, A.Y.C., Morse, R. and Rajan, R.S. 2013. Quality assurance and accreditation in higher education: Challenges and opportunities. *Higher Education Evaluation and Development*, **7**(2): 7–15.

Dill, D.D. 2010. Quality assurance in higher education: Practices and issues. *International Encyclopedia of Education*, **7**: 377–383.

van der Wende, M.C. 2007. Internationalization of higher education in the OECD countries: Challenges and opportunities for the coming decade. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, **11**(3-4): 274–289.

NAAC. 2020. Manuals for Accreditation. *National Assessment and Accreditation Council*. Retrieved from http://www.naac.gov.in/

Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology (ABET). (n.d.). *Criteria for Accrediting Engineering Programs*. Retrieved from https://www.abet.org/

Ministry of Education, Government of India. (2020). *National Education Policy* 2020. Retrieved from https://www.education.gov.in/nep2020/

Eaton, J.S. 2012. *An Overview of U.S. Accreditation*. Council for Higher Education Accreditation.

Shah, M. and Nair, C.S. (Eds.). 2016. *A Global Perspective on Private Higher Education*. Elsevier.

Stensaker, B. and Harvey, L. (Eds.). 2011. *Accountability in Higher Education: Global Perspectives on Trust and Power*. Routledge.