“INVESTIGATING THE IMPACT OF NAAC ACCREDITATION ON PERCEIVED SERVICE QUALITY AND CONSUMER CONFIDENCE FOR HIGHER EDUCATION IN MADHYA PRADESH, INDIA”

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Sachin Verma, BE, M Tech, MA HRA

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By

Sachin Verma

Supervised by

Prof. Luka Lesko

APPROVED BY

Anna Provodnikova, PhD

Dissertation chair

RECEIVED/APPROVED BY:

Renee Goldstein Osmic

Admissions Director

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AI tools were used in a limited capacity to assist with formatting, organizing content, and refining language; the intellectual contributions and interpretations remain my own.

ABSTRACT

"INVESTIGATING THE IMPACT OF NAAC ACCREDITATION ON PERCEIVED SERVICE QUALITY AND CONSUMER CONFIDENCE FOR HIGHER EDUCATION IN MADHYA PRADESH, INDIA"

By

Sachin Verma

(2025)

Dissertation Chair:

This research examines the influence of NAAC accreditation on service quality perception and consumer trust in higher education institutions (HEIs) in Madhya Pradesh, India. As the state is witnessing accelerated growth in higher education—along with regional imbalance in infrastructural facilities and access to them—NAAC accreditation has emerged as a vital quality determinant impacting institutional credibility as well as stakeholder choice.

The research investigates six dimensions: awareness of accreditation, effect on service quality, effect on consumer confidence, comparison of accredited and non-accredited HEIs, challenges in gaining accreditation, and overall stakeholder perception towards higher education. A mixed methods research design was utilized, both with quantitative data through a well-structured questionnaire various students, parents, teaching staff, and administrators from accredited and non-accredited HEIs, and for a qualitative study, previous research was explored. SERVQUAL method was applied to quantify five dimensions of service quality: tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy.

It is revealed that NAAC accreditation information has a considerable impact on institutional choice by students and parents for accredited higher education institutions. Those organizations accredited performed more positively on service provision—providing superior infrastructure, faculty assistance, student services, and institution transparency regularly. NAAC status also bears consumer confidence that enhances trust, recruitment enhancement, and presumed career prospects.

But the study also points to barriers in higher education systems, especially for non-accredited institutions. These constraints are mainly inadequate infrastructure, inadequate teaching staff, low levels of awareness concerning the accreditation processes, and poor administrative capacity. All these factors constrain first-time accreditation and continuous quality improvement. While the accreditation can trigger institutional growth and development, its impact is uneven due to such structural disadvantages.

The study also discovers that NAAC accreditation is not merely an indicator of quality but also an indicator of institutional credibility and public accountability. But if it is to be harnessed as a tool for change, facilitatory policies such as earmarked grants, capacity building, and mentoring would have to bridge divisions in the sector. These findings are in consonance with the aspirations of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 and highlight the need for an inclusive, transparent, and context-sensitive accreditation process to improve higher education in Madhya Pradesh, India.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES vi

LIST OF FIGURES viii

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION 1

1.1 Introduction 1
1.2 Research Problem 18
1.3 Purpose of Research 20
1.4 Significance of the Study 21
1.5 Research Purpose and Questions 25

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF LITERATURE 28

2.1 Theoretical Framework: Higher Educational Institutions and Service Quality 28
2.2 Theory of Reasoned Action and NAAC Accreditation 38
2.3 Human Society Theory: Perceived Service Quality and Consumer Confidence 41
2.4 Summary 54

Chapter III: METHODOLOGY 58

3.1 Overview of the Research Problem 58
3.2 Operationalization of Theoretical Constructs 61
3.3 Research Purpose and Questions 63
3.4 Research Design 65
3.5 Population and Sample 66
3.6 Participant Selection 66
3.7 Instrumentation 67
3.8 Data Collection Procedures 68
3.9 Data Analysis 68
3.10 Research Design Limitations 69
3.11 Conclusion 69

CHAPTER IV: RESULTS 70

4.1 Research Question One 70
4.2 Research Question Two 74
4.3 Research Question Three 83
4.4 Research Question Four 89

4.5 Research Question Five 94
4.6 Research Question Six 100
4.7 Summary of Findings 107
4.8 Conclusion 111

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION 112

5.1 Discussion of Results 112
5.2 Discussion of Research Question One 112
5.2 Discussion of Research Question Two 113
5.3 Discussion of Research Question Three 114
5.4 Discussion of Research Question Four 115
5.5 Discussion of Research Question Five 117
5.6 Discussion of Research Question Six 119

CHAPTER VI: SUMMARY, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS 121

6.1 Summary 121
6.2 Implications 122
6.3 Suggestions for Future Studies 124
6.4 Conclusion 125

References 126

Appendix A 134

LIST OF TABLES

Table 3.1: SERVQUAL Dimension Variables

Table 3.2: Consumer Confidence Variables

Table 4.1: Awareness of NAAC accreditation and perception of students and parents selecting higher education institutions

Table 4.2: Model Summary

Table 4.3: ANOVA

Table 4.4: Coefficients

Table 4.5: Residuals Statistics

Table 4.6: NAAC accreditation and perceived service quality

Table 4.7: Descriptive Statistics

Table 4.8: Correlations

Table 4.9: Model Summary

Table 4.10: ANOVA

Table 4.11: Coefficients

Table 4.12: Coefficient Correlations

Table 4.13: Collinearity Diagnostics

Table 4.14: Residuals Statistics

Table 4.15: NAAC Accreditation and Consumer Confidence

Table 4.16: Descriptive Statistics

Table 4.17: Correlations

Table 4.18: Model Summary

Table 4.19: ANOVA

Table 4.20: Coefficients

Table 4.21: Collinearity Diagnostics

Table 4.22: Perceived Service Quality Variables of Higher Education Institutions Descriptive Statistics

Table 4.23: Perceived Service Quality Variables of Accredited Higher Education Institutions Descriptive Statistics

Table 4.24: Perceived Service Quality Variables of Non-Accredited Higher Education Institutions

Table 4.25: Significant Predictors of Perceived Service Quality Variables for Higher Education Institutions

Table 4.26: Consumer Confidence Variables of Higher Education Institutions Descriptive Statistics

Table 4.27: Consumer Confidence Variables of Accredited Higher Education Institutions Descriptive Statistics

Table 4.28: Consumer Confidence Variables of Non-Accredited Higher Education Institutions Descriptive Statistics

Table 4.29: Significant Predictors of Consumer Confidence Variables for Higher Education Institutions

Table 4.30: Hypothesis Test Summary

Table 4.31: Pairwise Comparisons

Table 4.32: Demographic Profile of Respondents

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 4.1: Awareness of NAAC accreditation

Figure 4.2: Perception of students and parents

Figure 4.3: Consideration of the NAAC score for Selection

Figure 4.4: Influence of NAAC accreditation on selection decision

Figure 4.5: NAAC accreditation and perceived service quality

Figure 4.6: Related-Samples Friedman's Two-Way Analysis of Variance by Ranks

Figure 4.7: Pairwise Comparisons

Figure 4.8: Continuous Field Information Financial Issues

Figure 4.9: Continuous Field Information Shortage of Qualified Faculty

Figure 4.10: Continuous Field Information Inadequate Infrastructure

Figure 4.11: Continuous Field Information Administrative Inefficiency

Figure 4.12: Continuous Field Information Lack of NAAC Awareness

Figure 4.13: Continuous Field Information Staff Turnover

Figure 4.14: Continuous Field Information Other

Figure 4.15: Age

Figure 4.16: Gender

Figure 4.17: Annual Income

Figure 4.18: Stakeholder

Figure 5.1: Perceived Service Quality Model for Higher Education Institutions

Figure 5.2: Consumer Confidence Model for Higher Education Institutions

CHAPTER I:

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

1.1.1 Higher Education in India and Madhya Pradesh

With the evolving situation of Indian higher education, quality assurance frameworks are becoming increasingly significant. One of the most high-profile organizations ensuring the quality of education in India is the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC). Established by the University Grants Commission (UGC) in 1994, NAAC attempts to evaluate and accredit higher education institutions (HEIs) based on some quality parameters. With the launch of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, the focus on accreditation has increased tremendously, making NAAC a pillar of educational reform and enhancement. In Madhya Pradesh, a central Indian state with a mix of public and private higher education institutions, NAAC accreditation is becoming a determinant of institutional credibility and student trust.

NAAC accreditation analyzes institutions on several parameters such as curriculum, the teaching-learning process, research and innovation, physical infrastructure, student support services, and governance. Institutions are graded from A++ to D, with higher grades typically reflecting better educational services. In Madhya Pradesh alone, more than 50 universities and more than 1,500 affiliated colleges admit students, and the quality of higher education is radically different in urban and rural regions. NAAC accreditation in this regard acts not only as an instrument for institutional development but also affects public perception and student enrollment decisions. Institutions that are accredited and those with better grades are perceived to provide more dependable and efficient services in education.

Service quality perception in higher education is the all-encompassing experience the students go through during their learning journey. This encompasses classroom teaching, faculty competence, administrative effectiveness, learning resources availability, facilities on campus, and emotional and academic support for students. Based on models such as the SERVQUAL model (Parasuraman et al., 1988), service quality in education can be quantified

by dimensions such as tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. NAAC accreditation has an impact on these aspects directly by compelling institutions to enhance pedagogy, enhance infrastructure, implement e-learning, and adopt student-centric methods.

Furthermore, NAAC accreditation has a substantial impact on consumer confidence, in this case, students, parents, and industry partners. Institutions with higher grades in NAAC are considered to be more trusted, leading to higher student intakes, better placement, and greater industry interactions. In Madhya Pradesh, particularly in institutions like Government Holkar Science College Indore (NAAC A+), which has a brand reputation for academic excellence and uniform student performance, this has been true. Even private colleges like LNCT University and Amity University at Gwalior have leveraged their NAAC accreditation to enhance brand equity as well as compete to attract the best students and best teachers.

There are still challenges. Not everyone benefits from accreditation, particularly those institutions in rural or under-resourced areas where faculty hiring and infrastructure building are continuous concerns. Some of those institutions treat accreditation like a bureaucratic process instead of an instrument of true reform, which can result in cosmetic changes that do little to improve student experience. Besides, there is usually a gap between the NAAC grade assigned and the ground realities faced by the students. This difference can influence the credibility of the accreditation process and defeat its very purpose.

In order to enhance the effect of NAAC accreditation in Madhya Pradesh, some steps can be taken. Institutions, especially in rural regions, should be provided with assistance and training to effectively meet the standards of accreditation. The government and NAAC ought to invest in capacity-building programmes to ensure institutions recognize the essence of quality assurance, going beyond mere evaluation. There can also be more transparency of accreditation criteria and marks, and thus, decisions from students and parents will become better informed. Top performers would also be motivated through grants, research funds, and awards.

Finally, NAAC accreditation is important in influencing the perceived service quality and building consumer confidence in higher education in Madhya Pradesh. The institutions with superior grades enjoy a better public perception, improved student outcomes, and

increased credibility. Nevertheless, the process needs to change to take care of prevailing disparities and instill a culture of ongoing quality improvement. While the state works to harmonize with the vision of NEP 2020, NAAC accreditation shall remain a critical driver of academic quality and institutional responsibility.

1.1.1.1 Overview of the Growth and Expansion of Higher Education Institutions in India

India's higher education has experienced tremendous growth over the past decades. Post-independence, India was mainly interested in developing an independent and strong education system. The development of institutions such as Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) and Indian Institutes of Management (IIMs) during the 1950s and 1960s provided a strong base to India's higher education system. These institutions were intended to address the nation's demand for engineers, managers, and researchers.

Growth and Expansion (Post-2000s)

Since the onset of the new millennium, the scenario of higher education has transformed dramatically. As a result of economic liberalization, globalization, and rising middle-class demand for quality education, India experienced:

1. Increase in the Number of Institutions: From around 300 universities in the early 2000s, India now has over 1,000 universities, including public and private institutions. The number of colleges has risen exponentially as well, ensuring that higher education is more accessible than ever before.

2. Rise of Private Institutions: Over the last two decades, numerous private institutions have been founded, providing diverse academic programs. This change also resolved the issue of over-population in public colleges and universities.

3. Internationalization and Globalization: As more cross-border cooperation increased, India emerged as a desirable location for foreign students, particularly those in the surrounding region such as Nepal, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka. Universities such as the O.P. Jindal Global University and Ashoka University are some of the private

universities that have managed to attract foreign students, further making India a preferred destination as an international educational center.

4. Technology Integration: Advances in technology have given birth to digital learning platforms, virtual universities, and Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs). With the help of platforms such as SWAYAM and National Repository of Open Educational Resources (NROER), students are now able to access quality education from anywhere in India, particularly those who live in remote locations.

Policy Initiatives

The Indian government has played a crucial role in the development of higher education through several policy initiatives:

- National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF): It was launched by the Ministry of Education and assists universities and colleges in assessing performance and inducing competitiveness to enhance quality in education.

- Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY): This program imparts skill courses to enhance employment and makes higher education relevant to industry demand.

- Education Quality Improvement Initiatives: Initiatives such as Rashtriya Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA) and Atal Innovation Mission (AIM) focus on improving the quality of education, infrastructure, and innovation in institutions nationwide.

1.1.1.2 Significance of Quality in Higher Education

With the expansion of the higher education sector in India, the emphasis on sustaining and enhancing quality has become imperative due to the following reasons:

Globalization and Competition

With increasing global competition, Indian universities and colleges need to adhere to international quality standards to remain competitive. A well-established educational institution attracts talent not only from India but also from abroad. Quality institutions like IITs and IIMs are globally recognized, and they often rank well in international education rankings.

Employability and Skill Development

An efficient higher education system is essential to ensure that the graduates have skills that are desired by employers. Institutions of higher education must:

1. Upgrade Skill Sets: Equip students to meet the fast-changing world of jobs by educating them in not only theoretical aspects but also hands-on skills pertinent to their area of work.

2. Encourage Research and Innovation: Quality institutions encourage research that culminates in innovation. Emphasis on research guarantees that students acquire critical thinking and problem-solving skills, which are greatly appreciated in the job market.

Quality Assurance through Accreditation

Accreditation agencies such as the National Board of Accreditation (NBA) and NAAC have a crucial role to play in sustaining and ensuring quality in Indian higher education. These agencies assess institutions on a number of parameters and ensure that they provide programs that are up to international standards.

- NAAC Accreditation: NAAC-accredited institutions are mostly of better quality since the accreditation is a more rigorous assessment considering infrastructure, teaching, research output, and student satisfaction.

- Outcome-based Education: The focus on outcome-based education (OBE) assists institutions in aligning their goals with international educational standards. OBE measures the capacity of institutions to produce certain learning outcomes among the students.

Research and Innovation

Quality education fuels research, which is the key to the progress of society. Higher learning institutions that encourage innovation and provoke research in every field — from technology and health to social sciences — have a central position in the growth of a nation. Indian Institutes of Science (IISc), IITs, and IIMs are taking the lead in producing cutting-edge research with global relevance.

1.1.1.3 Madhya Pradesh Role and Challenge of Higher Education

Madhya Pradesh contains huge potential in terms of the contribution to higher education, though it faces several challenges impacting development and quality of higher education.

Challenge in Madhya Pradesh

1. Geographical Imbalances: Madhya Pradesh is highly rural, with most of its population living in rural locales that are far away from the cities. This poses logistical challenges to the student who wants higher studies. The absence of quality institutions in rural locales compels the student to migrate to the cities, a costly exercise and a burden.

2. Lack of Infrastructure: All the Madhya Pradesh colleges, especially rural areas of the state, lack well-established infrastructure. These include poor-quality libraries, old laboratories, and a lack of exposure to new technology, thereby hampering the quality of education.

3. Limited Faculty: There are no sufficient well-qualified teachers in Madhya Pradesh, especially in engineering, science, and management. Without the right teachers, academic standards cannot be raised.

4. Dropout Rates: College dropout continues to be an issue in the state, with so many students failing to complete classes because of economic difficulties, familial obligations, or lack of adequate motivation.

5. Low Research Output: Madhya Pradesh has good universities but a relatively lower research inclination per state. Lack of research finance, infrastructure, and research environment in most of the universities leads to less innovation and development within the higher education sector of Madhya Pradesh.

Opportunities for Growth in Madhya Pradesh

Madhya Pradesh has great opportunities for growth in higher education despite all these challenges:

1. Government Schemes: Government schemes to make education more accessible have been introduced, including scholarships, the establishment of new universities and colleges, and affiliation with national bodies like NAAC and UGC to enhance quality.

2. Vocational Education: More emphasis is being placed on vocational education and skill development. With more emphasis on vocational courses, Madhya Pradesh institutions can prepare students to be industry-ready for the manufacturing, agriculture, and information technology industries.

3. Public-Private Partnerships: Public-private university-industry partnerships can bridge some of the resource limitations of state institutions.

4. Emphasis on Regional Development: Madhya Pradesh can leverage its natural endowments and diversity by providing specialized higher education in agriculture, tourism, and renewable energy, aligning the state's education system with the regional comparative advantage. Investigating the Impact of NAAC Accreditation on Perceived Service Quality and Consumer Confidence for Higher Education in Madhya Pradesh.

NAAC Accreditation: A Catalyst for Institutional Growth

Accreditation plays a crucial role in improving the quality of education. NAAC-accredited colleges will get funding, their ranking will be better, and they will hire good staff. In the state of Madhya Pradesh, where several colleges are trying to enhance their infrastructure and curriculum, NAAC accreditation can play a vital role in determining the future of higher education.

Perceived Service Quality and Consumer Confidence

When Madhya Pradesh institutions are accredited through NAAC, it is likely to boost the confidence of people. The accreditation indicates that the institution is dedicated to delivering high-quality education, administration, and infrastructure.

1. Student Confidence: Student and parent preference goes to NAAC-accredited colleges since they feel that such colleges are of higher quality. This manifests in greater enrolments and higher levels of satisfaction among students.

2. Improved Placement: NAAC-accredited colleges have improved industry links, thereby more jobs for the graduates and thereby improved consumer confidence in the quality of education.

Problems in the NAAC Process

Although important, the NAAC accreditation process consumes time and money and involves a lot of institutional investment. For most institutions in Madhya Pradesh, particularly rural or weaker economic sectors, securing the stringent requirements of NAAC is a real challenge. Expanding higher education in India, and in Madhya Pradesh, is a sophisticated but fascinating process. Much has been accomplished, yet there are still areas of infrastructure, quality, and access to education that prove difficult. Only those institutions that receive NAAC accreditation are the ones that are regarded as the model of quality and innovation, and they are the ones to which others also aspire. Addressing regional differences, upgrading infrastructure, and strengthening faculty will help the state unlock the potential of its higher education system for the benefit of students and society at large.

1.1.2 NAAC's Contribution in Higher Education

The National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) has a crucial role to play in improving the quality of higher education in India, especially in states such as Madhya Pradesh, where the education sector is diverse and growing at a fast pace. It was instituted in 1994 by the University Grants Commission (UGC) under the NAAC as an autonomous body for the evaluation and accreditation of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) on the basis of a variety of quality parameters like teaching-learning processes, research output, infrastructure, student support services, and institutional management. In Madhya Pradesh's case, NAAC accreditation has significantly influenced student perception of service quality and decision-making about higher education. Institutions with positive NAAC grades tend to be perceived as more trustworthy, reliable, and committed to quality education, with a direct consequence on how students perceive service quality. This boosts consumer confidence still further, because accreditation is itself a quality-checking mechanism communicating trust, responsibility, and upgrade. For student and parent,

Madhya Pradesh, especially at the time of choosing between urban and rural or public and private colleges, having a high rating from NAAC is an indispensable factor in this decision. Additionally, NAAC-accredited colleges have greater chances of recruiting better faculty, receiving government grants, engaging with foreign collaborators, and providing better placement opportunities, all of which increase confidence among stakeholders. Therefore, NAAC not only stimulates institutional growth and competitiveness within the state but also acts as a catalyst for creating a more student-focused, transparent, and quality-oriented higher education ecosystem within Madhya Pradesh.

1.1.2.1 NAAC: Role in Quality Assessment

The prime function of NAAC is to assess the quality status of an institution and provide a credible mechanism of assessment and accreditation. NAAC encourages institutions to transcend minimum eligibility standards and work towards consistent improvement in academic and administrative functioning.

Key Functions of Quality Assessment

Establishing Benchmarks: NAAC sets precise standards of quality for institutions, from curriculum and faculty expertise to infrastructure adequacy, student success, research productivity, and effective governance practices.

- Facilitating Culture of Excellence: By creating proper self-assessment and peer review mechanisms, NAAC enables institutions to foster in-house culture of quality and sustained improvement.

- Innovating and Best Practices: Institutions are motivated to implement innovative teaching-learning process, adopt ICT (Information and Communication Technology), and cultivate socially responsive research practices.

- Providing Institutional Feedback: NAAC gives feedback to institutions through detailed assessment reports, pointing out strengths as also areas of improvement. This facilitates strategic planning for future growth.

- Supporting Government Policies: NAAC is a valuable adjunct for UGC and the Ministry of Education in supporting national education policies and their successful implementation at the institutional level.

1.1.2.2 NAAC Accreditation: Process and Criteria

NAAC has a methodical and systematic method of assessing the quality of institutions offering higher education. The accreditation process is a step-by-step process with well-defined parameters. Seven NAAC Accreditation Criteria:

1. Curricular Aspects
2. Teaching-Learning and Evaluation
3. Research, Consultancy and Extension
4. Infrastructure and Learning Resources
5. Student Support and Progression
6. Governance, Leadership and Management
7. Innovations and Best Practices

NAAC Accreditation Process

Institutional Registration: The institution signs in NAAC's portal and uploads the Institutional Information for Quality Assessment (IIQA). Then Self-Study Report (SSR): A comprehensive report of institutional functioning, to be prepared and submitted by the institution. After submitting this Data Validation and Verification (DVV), NAAC cross-verifies information submitted against documentary evidence. There is also a new section, Student Satisfaction Survey (SSS): Online students' feedback on teaching-learning and support services shall be taken by a peer team. Finally, the Peer Team Visit: Experts visit the institution for a spot assessment, stakeholder interaction, and facility inspection. Accreditation Outcome: NAAC awards a CGPA (Cumulative Grade Point Average) and corresponding grade (e.g., A++, A+, B, etc.). Accreditation is for 5 years.

1.1.2.3 NAAC Accreditation Implications to Madhya Pradesh Institutions

To Madhya Pradesh institutions - a state characterized by socio-economic and geographical disparities in education — NAAC accreditation is of utmost importance. It not only raises institutional reputation but also makes them eligible for funds, collaboration, and students' confidence.

1. Enhancement of Quality: A majority of institutions in Madhya Pradesh - particularly in rural and semi-urban regions — are plagued by out-of-date infrastructure, teaching faculty shortages, and limited resources. NAAC accreditation highlights shortcomings and provides a roadmap for improvement in academics, governance, and infrastructure.

2. Availability of Finance and Schemes: Institutions with higher NAAC grades qualify for funding under schemes like RUSA (Rashtriya Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan) and World Bank's TEQIP (Technical Education Quality Improvement Programme). Accreditation often becomes a condition for being a member of centrally sponsored schemes and international collaborative programmes.

3. Improved Governance by Students: With the growing intensity of competition within academic circles, parents and students look up NAAC-accredited colleges as being more reliable and worthy. Such accredited colleges of Madhya Pradesh will be likely to attract quality students and lecturers, most importantly compared to their unaccredited counterparts.

4. Enhancing Employability and Industry Networking: NAAC-accredited institutions have better placement records due to enhanced industry interfaces. Employees are more confident of hiring from NAAC-accredited colleges, knowing that such colleges maintain national standards of education and skill development.

5. Encouraging Internal Reforms: The emphasis on continual self-examination by NAAC encourages institutions to develop administrative, curricular, faculty, and research culture reforms. It encourages a quality-conscious academic culture, essential for long-term institutional development. NAAC is in the lead position to ascertain the quality, reputation, and impact of higher education in India. For a state like Madhya Pradesh, where many institutions are in pursuit of national and international visibility,

NAAC accreditation is a catalyst. By adhering to accreditation standards, institutions not only improve their academic programs but also enhance the trust of stakeholders — students, parents, teachers, industries, and policymakers.

1.1.3 The Service Quality Concept in Higher Education

In the changing environment of global education, service quality has become a critical indicator by which higher education institutions (HEIs) are measured, distinguished, and selected by their key stakeholders—students and parents. In India alone, whose system of higher education is one of the world's largest and most heterogeneous, quality of service has become a mainstay concern for institutions with pressures to compete, be answerable, and maintain international standards. Madhya Pradesh, whose interesting combination of urban and rural clusters of education hubs, state-university-backed centres, self-run colleges, and private centres for learning reflects miniaturised replica of the grander education complex, serves the purpose here in illustrating that vastness and variation. Here, quality of service is not only an intellectual concept but a determining parameter that drives consumer decisions, public opinion, and policy decisions. Here, NAAC (National Assessment and Accreditation Council) plays an increasingly important role. NAAC is a national accrediting agency with the responsibility to assess and develop the quality of Indian higher educational institutions through orderly assessment and constant improvement systems. NAAC accreditation not only represents regulation compliance and scholarly legitimacy but also serves as an assurance of quality signal to scholars, parents, and the larger academic community. While central in importance, its real impact on the perceived institution's service quality—and thus consumer confidence—still is an area that has been far from researched thoroughly, even in the socio-educational context of Madhya Pradesh. This research will bridge this gap by examining how NAAC accreditation influences people's perception and confidence in higher education institutions within the state.

1.1.3.1 Higher Education Service Quality

Higher education in the present times is being identified more so than ever not just as a public good but also as a service industry, wherein institutions are service providers and

students are informed consumers. During this paradigm shift, the concept of service quality turns into a corner-stone construct that covers an extensive range of experiences—ranging from admissions processes and classroom teaching to bureaucratic responsiveness, physical plant, out-of-class participation, career guidance, and alumni services. Since educational services are intangible, experience-based, and co-created through interaction between students, faculty, and staff, they cannot be compared directly to tangible goods. Thus, the quality of such services is by nature subjective, dependent on expectations, cultural background, and personal requirements.

In Madhya Pradesh, where institutional quality differences between regions are pronounced, perception of service quality assumes an even greater importance. Students from small towns or rural areas might give more importance to factors like faculty attention, hostel facilities, and placement records than students from urban areas. As institutions vie for enrolments in an increasingly aspirational and informed student market, understanding, measuring, and enhancing service quality becomes crucial—not just for institutional development but also for student satisfaction, retention, and academic performance.

1.1.3.2 Key Dimensions of Service Quality

In order to rigorously assess service quality in higher education, scholars have devised several theoretical models. Among the most seminal is the SERVQUAL model, which enumerates five principal dimensions: tangibles (physical environments and equipment), reliability (capability to provide the promised service consistently), responsiveness (readiness to assist students and deliver speedy service), assurance (courtesy and knowledge of staff and their capability to generate trust), and empathy (concern, personalized attention). When applied to higher education, these dimensions can further encompass factors such as curriculum relevance, faculty expertise, ease of administrative procedures, learning facilities, industry interface, and emotional support systems.

Student perceptions of these dimensions in Madhya Pradesh are likely to differ depending on institutional type (private or public), accreditation status, location, and socioeconomic status. An institution well-credited may be seen as more assuring and

dependable, hence more attractive to students valuing well-stated governance and accountability. Lack of accreditation, on the other hand, may lead one to question institutional stability, academic quality, and post-graduate opportunities. These factors are the essence of the service quality construct as perceived by education consumers in the region.

1.1.3.3 Accreditation's Impact on Service Quality

Within India's quality assurance system, NAAC accreditation is a mark of excellence that serves to promote transparency, accountability, and ongoing improvement in HEIs. The accreditation process is detailed, encompassing a rigorous institutional self-study, peer review, and grading on several parameters such as curricular aspects, teaching-learning assessment, infrastructure, student support services, governance, and innovation. An NAAC rating of A is often displayed by institutions as a mark of distinction, which they hope will culminate in higher enrolments, funding prospects, recruitment of faculty members, and higher stakeholder confidence.

But aside from the institutional and administrative implications, there is one fundamental question: Does NAAC accreditation have any bearing on how students and parents perceive the quality of education? More particularly, does it generate greater confidence among consumers when selecting between comparably positioned institutions? Whereas accreditation guarantees an institution the meeting of a minimum quality threshold, the extent to which such formal acknowledgement registers with students' actual experience and aspirations has not been well explored, particularly within regional education landscapes such as Madhya Pradesh.

This study explores the complex interplay between formal accreditation and informal perception with a view to finding out if NAAC's quality evaluations are translated into students' satisfaction levels, their faith in the institution's credibility, and their propensity to recommend it to others. As higher education consumer behavior becomes more rational, data-driven, and quality-oriented, it is important to understand this linkage not only for institutional strategists but also for policymakers, accrediting agencies, and educational researchers.

1.1.4 Consumer Confidence in Higher Education

Consumer confidence has also emerged as a leading cause of institutional success and sustainability in today's Indian higher education marketplace. Just as students, and now parents as well, increasingly think of themselves as consumers of education, the choice of an institution is no longer about convenience or expense—instead, it is an act of trust, perceived value, and eventual return on investment. Universities are now being expected to deliver not only knowledge but also employability, a safe and conducive environment, ethics, and transparency in their operations.

In a state like Madhya Pradesh, with a wide range of institutions spread across urban, semi-urban, and rural areas, consumer confidence plays an even greater role. Students are faced with a crowded and often bewildering marketplace of educational products, many of which are little known or whose reputations are untested. As a result, they are increasingly relying on tangible quality indicators—first and foremost among these being NAAC accreditation—to direct their decisions and minimize the hazards of educational investment. This sub-section explores the multi-faceted nature of consumer confidence, its heightened significance in institutional selection, and the extent to which accreditation plays in enhancing confidence and influencing decision-making behavior by students and families.

1.1.4.1 Role of Consumer Confidence in Selecting Institutions

The development of students as educated consumers has redefined the way in which higher education institutions must position themselves. Consumer confidence in this case is the perceived confidence that an institution will deliver on its academic, developmental, and professional promises. It entails a belief in the institution's capability, consistency, and commitment to student success. Consumer confidence is shaped by several factors, including:

1. Institutional reputation and history of performance
2. Faculty qualifications and instructional effectiveness
3. Facilities, security, and student services
4. Affiliations, honors, and accreditation

5. Student achievement—placements, post-secondary educational opportunities, alumni success

In regions like Madhya Pradesh, where first-generation students or those belonging to socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds abound, the decision to pursue education further is highly economic, social, and emotionally charged. These students do not merely desire institutional trust but require it for the sustainability of the institution to make a difference at the very first stage of institutional choice but also in affecting student enrollment, engagement, motivation, and satisfaction throughout their study programs.

Also, very high consumer confidence levels may produce word-of-mouth, brand reputation, and long-term institutional capital formation. Perceived untrustworthiness or transparency shortfall may destroy confidence, decrease student loyalty, and impact an institution's capacity for attracting talent, investment, and alliances. Building and sustaining consumer confidence, therefore, is a strategic imperative for institutions of higher education.

1.1.4.2 Accreditation's Influence on Trust and Decision-Making

In this dynamic education sector, external endorsement in the form of accreditation has been one of the strongest tools for generating consumer trust. NAAC accreditation is an effective agent in institutional credibility. It is a dispassionate benchmark, giving students and parents assurance of the adherence of a facility to quality, accountability, and continuous improvement. Accreditation has an impact on trust and decision-making in the following important ways:

Increase Transparency and Legitimacy

NAAC's assessment relies on clearly specified parameters in academic, administrative, infrastructural, and student-related aspects. Public disclosure of results such as grades and performance indicators makes it easier for prospective students to judge institutions on the basis of standardized and comparable metrics. Such transparency encourages confidence and decreases the sense of uncertainty or misinformation.

Decreasing Perceived Risk

To the purchaser who has to deal with an overabundance of choice, particularly in non-supported and private domains, NAAC accreditation is a risk-minimizer. High-grade (A and above) institutions are viewed as more secure, dependable, and innovative, while non-accredited institutions are viewed as untested or non-reliable.

Influencing Psychological and Social Perceptions

Accreditation has symbolic capital. Students take NAAC-accredited institutions to imply better teachers, greater chances, and better social standing. In a society where education selection is part and parcel of social mobility and status, this symbolic capital has enormous power to influence customer behavior.

Shaping Access to Opportunities

NAAC-accredited institutions are preferred by employers, eligible for government grants, and succeed in other areas of academics and administration. Students are becoming more cognizant of the fact that enrolling in a well-accredited institution can provide more career and academic opportunities and therefore become an instrumental variable in the choice of institution.

Driving Institutional Improvement and Confidence Loop

Accreditation affects not only consumer confidence but also forces institutions to adhere to standards of quality. As institutions improve services to maintain or enhance their NAAC grades, they also enhance the student experience, thereby strengthening the cycle of confidence—where trust leads to improved services, and improved services generate greater trust. The convergence of accreditation, perceived quality, and consumer confidence is the focus of this research. In Madhya Pradesh, where diversity of institutions is matched by diversity in levels of regulatory control, the NAAC accreditation plays a pivotal role—not merely as a compliance measure, but as a source of public trust and informed choice. A glimpse of how students and parents understand and react to the outcome of accreditation will provide useful insights into the wider debate over quality assurance and stakeholder participation in Indian higher education. This research aims, therefore, to fill the gap between

policy interventions and consumer attitudes towards finally establishing more responsible, open, and student-oriented educational institutions.

1.2 Research Problem

The fast-changing scenario of higher education in India, especially in Madhya Pradesh, has made the institutions more required to improve their quality and attract potential students. With the rise in demand for quality education comes the need for accreditation as a tool to validate that institutions achieve set academic and infrastructural criteria. NAAC is the major accrediting agency for higher education institutions (HEIs) in India, with the responsibility of evaluating the quality of education offered by higher education institutions against a stringent set of criteria. Although NAAC accreditation is widely regarded as a quality stamp, its direct impact on perceived service quality and consumer confidence—particularly in the Madhya Pradesh, India context, is under-researched.

Madhya Pradesh, India, provides a unique context for this research, given its heterogeneous population, inter-regional disparities in educational infrastructure, and the specific challenges of institutions in non-metropolitan areas. Many higher education institutions in the state, especially those in rural or semi-urban areas, are either in the process of obtaining NAAC accreditation or have not done so yet due to economic constraints, inadequate infrastructure, or limited faculty support. Despite this, tertiary education remains in demand, as prospective students and parents increasingly seek higher education institutions that provide not only academic excellence but also robust support services, facilities, and an overall positive student experience.

Since the state has tremendous diversity between its higher education institutions, NAAC accreditation exerts tremendous heterogeneity in affecting opinions about the service quality among the students, parents, teachers, and other interested parties. Although NAAC accreditation is normally linked to higher-quality instruction, modern facilities, and well-organized curricula, the extent to which this accreditation affects the perceived service quality—that is, such aspects as faculty competence, student support, and facilities on campus—differs across institutions. The institutions with better NAAC grades can be thought

to provide better academic and non-academic services, while institutions that do not have accreditation can be perceived as being short on these facilities, impacting their reputation and student satisfaction rates.

Further, consumer confidence—the vital consideration by future students and their families about making sound judgments about where to take higher education—is possibly very susceptible to the state of accreditation within an institution. Accreditation comes with a nod as a promise of trustworthiness, commitment to quality, and validation that the organization cares for continuing improvement. However, the question arises whether NAAC accreditation alone is enough to build and maintain consumer confidence, or whether other factors such as regional reputation, faculty-student interactions, and infrastructural developments play a more substantial role in shaping consumer decisions. In the case of Madhya Pradesh, India, where institutions may be less familiar or situated in far-flung areas, students and their parents may not be aware of or exposed to the accreditation status of an institution, that could further affect their trust in such institutions.

Additionally, although NAAC accreditation is designed to promote quality enhancement and customer confidence, it also has some challenges involved in the process. Higher education institutions in Madhya Pradesh encounter challenges in integrating their practices to NAAC's high standards based on resource limitations, low research output, or old teaching pedagogies. These challenges create a disparity in the quality of education between accredited and non-accredited institutions. In turn, such gaps are likely to exacerbate the deficit in trust between consumers and those who feel that the necessary quality can only be provided by accredited institutions. Secondly, even the process of assessment itself has at times been accused of depending too heavily on quantifiable indicators and not giving enough heed to the idiosyncratic contextual circumstances that may condition an institution's education product.

This study, therefore, attempts to examine systematically NAAC accreditation as a contribution toward the perceived service quality of institutions of higher learning in Madhya Pradesh and to its impact on consumer confidence. Through the ability to comprehend how accreditation influences the formation of the perception of academic quality, student

satisfaction, and institutional trust, the research will offer useful information on how state institutions of higher learning can enhance their reputation and competitiveness. Particularly, it will analyse whether accredited institutions are viewed to provide better educational services and, if they are, how these perceptions lead to higher rates of student enrolment, higher satisfaction levels, and higher stakeholder trust.

Furthermore, the research will also analyse the challenges of non-accredited institutions in achieving consumer trust and how it may increase the quality of service so that they could be an effective rival to their accredited competitors. The research will explore how accreditation influences stakeholders' attitudes, how institutions are reputably established through accreditation, and if consumer confidence is more strongly related to accreditation status or other factors like faculty expertise, student performance, and campus climate. Additionally, it will investigate the impact of accreditation on the institution's overall brand and how it influences the students' decision-making.

Finally, the research seeks to fill a very serious gap in the existing literature by its concentration on Madhya Pradesh, India, as the context under which the education sector has some specific issues in implementing accreditation standards. The conclusions will provide valuable recommendations to policymakers, education leaders, and leadership institutions regarding how to make the best use of NAAC accreditation to enhance overall quality in higher education, foster consumer trust, and increase the reputation of education institutions in Madhya Pradesh, India. Through a more advanced understanding of the part played by accreditation in consumer trust and perceived quality of service, this study will contribute to the existing debate in Indian higher education regarding quality assurance.

1.3 Purpose of Research

The primary goal of this study is to evaluate the effect of NAAC accreditation on perceived service quality and consumer trust in Madhya Pradesh, India. The present study attempts to analyse the influence of NAAC accreditation on service quality perception and consumer trust in the higher education institutions of the region.

Specific Objectives

To achieve the main objective, these specific objectives have been outlined:

1. To comprehend the overview of NAAC accreditation in Madhya Pradesh, India.
2. To determine the awareness and perception of students, parents, and educational stakeholders regarding NAAC accreditation in Madhya Pradesh, India.
3. To assess the impact of NAAC accreditation on consumers' selection process for higher education institutions in Madhya Pradesh, India.
4. To study and measure the SERVQUAL method of service quality in higher education institutions.
5. To evaluate the effect of NAAC accreditation on the perceived service quality and consumer confidence in higher educational institutions in Madhya Pradesh, India.
6. To compare the perceived service quality and consumer confidence of NAAC-accredited versus non-accredited institutions in Madhya Pradesh, India.
7. To identify the potential challenges faced by institutions in Madhya Pradesh, India in obtaining or maintaining NAAC accreditation.
8. To recommend ways to reduce the gap between service quality expectation and perception.

1.4 Significance of the Study

The relevance of this research is twofold, both theoretical and practical, with regard to NAAC accreditation of higher education in Madhya Pradesh, India. The National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) is instrumental in defining quality standards for institutions of higher learning throughout India. Knowing how NAAC accreditation influences the perception of service quality and consumer confidence will help shape the future of higher education not only in Madhya Pradesh but for the entire nation.

1.4.1 Contribution to Academic Literature

The study makes an important contribution to the current pool of literature related to quality assurance in higher education, especially from the Indian context. Although other research has tried to examine the role of accreditation in contributing to institutional quality, there is no understanding yet regarding the role of NAAC accreditation in influencing perceived service quality in higher education as a whole. Service quality, such as the efficacy of instruction, infrastructure, faculty quality, and administrative services, is increasingly becoming a driver of student satisfaction and institutional reputation.

Taking Madhya Pradesh, one of the giant and diverse educational states, as the reference point, this study brings regional nuance to national debate about accreditation. It provides the opportunity to develop a greater understanding of the effects of the accreditation processes on not only the institutions themselves but also the students, parents, and community in general. This study is bound to contribute to the theoretical model of quality assurance in higher education, i.e., the function played by accreditation agencies like NAAC.

1.4.2 Practical Implications for Higher Education Institutions

At the grassroots level, the research can make a significant contribution towards informing higher learning institutions, particularly those in Madhya Pradesh that have experienced unprecedented growth in public and private colleges and universities. Since student families are also becoming increasingly more selective about institutions of higher learning, recognition or accreditation by credible agencies like NAAC becomes a top reason for informing decision-making among the students and their families.

By establishing the impact of NAAC accreditation on perceived service quality, this study can help educational institutions align their practices with NAAC quality standards. NAAC-accredited institutions can use the results to present their strengths more effectively to prospective students, while institutions seeking accreditation can use this study to identify areas, they need to improve to meet the expectations of students and other stakeholders.

In addition, knowledge of the relationship between accreditation and consumer confidence (i.e., student trust in institutions as a result of their accreditation status) can assist

institutions in establishing more effective relationships with their students, enhancing the campus climate, and increasing overall retention. Institutions may also use the results to assist with marketing and outreach since consumers are increasingly looking for assurances of quality before committing to a large educational investment.

1.4.3 Implications for Policymakers and Accreditation Bodies

For policy makers and regulators like the Ministry of Education and the NAAC itself, the results of this study can provide very valuable inputs on the efficacy of the accreditation process in improving education quality. It can assist them in making decisions whether or not the existing NAAC standards and evaluation procedures match the demands of the students and the general academic environment.

If the study identifies that NAAC accreditation has a positive influence on consumer confidence and perceived quality of service, then it might equally confirm the NAAC accreditation procedures and institutions as well. On the other hand, if the research indicates that the process of accreditation is less effective than desired, policymakers may consider revising the accreditation framework to make it more effective in addressing future trends and students' expectations in the 21st century. This can involve streamlining the evaluation criteria or enhancing the transparency and accessibility of the accreditation process.

Secondly, this study can be used as a means of increasing the accountability of institutions. It could reaffirm the need for ongoing quality improvement and offer a basis for enhancing the role of accreditation agencies in promoting an academic environment that is both rigorous and supportive of student achievement.

1.4.4 Students and Consumer Confidence

From a student and family point of view—the key consumers of higher education—this research potentially has some far-reaching effects on the perception that students have about the value of accreditation. In a growing competitive labor market, students are making increasingly thoughtful choices regarding which institution to undertake their higher education at, many times balancing concerns like reputation, graduate employment opportunities, and staff quality services.

If the study proves that NAAC accreditation results in a greater perception of service quality, parents and students can be more assured of choosing accredited institutions. Consumer confidence is key to driving enrollment and lowering dropout rates since students are more likely to stay in institutions they believe will deliver a high level of education and care. The research could thus enable students to make better decisions, matching their academic aspirations with institutions that are dedicated to upholding high-quality standards.

Additionally, by exploring the impact of accreditation on student expectations and satisfaction, this research can potentially reveal underlying drivers that influence students' choices and their overall learning experience. This can assist students in better understanding the intricacies of the higher education system and making informed choices about institutions that suit their individual, academic, and career goals.

1.4.5 Contribution to Institutional Improvement and National Education Goals

At the larger level, this research serves to facilitate the process of enhancing the quality of higher education in India, which is imperative for national development goals. With the Indian government working towards enhancing its international position in education, this research offers evidence-based knowledge regarding how accreditation systems can affect institutional quality and consumer confidence. Improving service quality at the accredited institutions will have a positive spin-off, bringing the entire educational standard to an improved level and helping develop an educated and expert workforce.

Moreover, by highlighting the significance of accreditation, this research enhances the position of quality assurance in determining the future of higher education in India. It can also be used as a template for other parts of the world and nations with the same educational systems, encouraging the notion that accreditation is not merely a procedural ritual but an important instrument for the improvement of educational standards and for ensuring that students are provided with the best possible service.

In conclusion, the significance of this study lies not only in its academic contributions but also in its practical applications for students, educational institutions, policymakers, and accreditation bodies. By investigating the effect of NAAC accreditation on perceived service

quality and consumer confidence, the study will offer useful insights that can inform the future path of higher education in Madhya Pradesh and elsewhere. It will help in improving the quality of higher education services, promote greater consumer trust, and ensure that India's higher education system continues to meet the needs of its diverse and expanding student body.

1.5 Research Purpose and Questions

The primary goal of this study is to evaluate the effect of NAAC accreditation on perceived service quality and consumer trust in Madhya Pradesh, India. The present study attempts to analyse the influence of NAAC accreditation on service quality perception and consumer trust in the higher education institutions of the region.

Specific Objectives

To achieve the main objective, these specific objectives have been outlined:

1. To comprehend the overview of NAAC accreditation in Madhya Pradesh, India.
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5. To evaluate the effect of NAAC accreditation on the perceived service quality and consumer confidence in higher educational institutions in Madhya Pradesh, India.
6. To compare the perceived service quality and consumer confidence of NAAC-accredited versus non-accredited institutions in Madhya Pradesh, India.
7. To identify the potential challenges faced by institutions in Madhya Pradesh, India in obtaining or maintaining NAAC accreditation.

8. To recommend ways to reduce the gap between service quality expectation and perception.

Research Question

The below research questions have been developed to meet the aims of this study:

1. Does the awareness of NAAC accreditation influence the perceptions of students and parents selecting higher education institutions in Madhya Pradesh, India?

2. Are there significant variations in service quality variables of accredited and non-accredited higher education institutions?

3. Does NAAC accreditation impact consumer confidence in higher education institutions?

4. Do the challenges faced by higher education institutions impact their ability to achieve or maintain NAAC accreditation?

5. Do students of NAAC-accredited institutions exhibit higher levels of consumer confidence compared to students of non-accredited institutions in Madhya Pradesh, India?

Conclusion

India's higher education system development, as seen in a state like Madhya Pradesh, is reflected in the increasing importance of quality assurance processes, such as NAAC accreditation. As the education sector expands rapidly and with rising expectations from students and stakeholders, respectively, accreditation has emerged as a sine qua non for institutional accountability, quality enhancement, and the development of public trust. As explained throughout the previous paragraphs, NAAC accreditation is not just a compliance exercise but acts as a reform driver in institutional improvement, leading higher educational institutions to refine teaching practices, infrastructure, administration, and student services.

Under the context of Madhya Pradesh, NAAC accreditation takes on added importance since the state encompasses educational diversity coupled with regional variances. Institutions that secure high NAAC grades are perceived to deliver enhanced

service quality—as attested to through student satisfaction, performance in examinations, and professional success—thereby engendering higher consumer confidence. Students and parents as consumers increasingly turn to such accreditation outcomes in order to make decisions in an increasingly competitive and often scattered education market. In addition, accreditation adds value to employability, encourages industry relationships, and opens the door to government subsidies and international partnerships. But whereas the advantages of accreditation are apparent, so are the challenges equally pertinent. It would be the nature of most of these institutions, especially in the rural areas, to be deprived of infrastructure facilities, teaching staff, and the sources of money that would leave them unable to achieve NAAC standards. To boot, disparities between accreditation results and actual outcomes could affect people's confidence in case there cannot be a chance to rectify this with transparency and ongoing scrutiny.

Finally, NAAC accreditation also plays an inexorable part in shaping the future trajectory of higher education in Madhya Pradesh by increasing perceived service quality and consumer confidence. It challenges institutions to excel while giving students and parents a good model for making educational decisions. To realize its optimal potential to bring about change, accreditation is both required and enabled by concerted government investment, institutional endorsement, and a quality improvement culture of an ongoing nature. As Madhya Pradesh progresses by the national education policy, such as NEP 2020, NAAC will be leading the way in building a resilient, inclusive, and world-class higher education system.

CHAPTER II:

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1 Theoretical Framework: Higher Educational Institutions and Service Quality

In the context of higher education, quality service is crucial to student satisfaction as well as institutional performance. Education is an important factor for socio-economic progress, wherein higher education has a primary role to provide educated professionals across different sectors. The framework of Quality Higher Education forms the basis of this section, which states that the quality of education influences experts' professionalism directly, which further has repercussions on national economic development and advancements. Professional and scientific personnel must be developed by higher education institutions, and the quality of education is important for highly qualified specialist development (Hryhorash et al., 2022).

Furthermore, NAAC (National Assessment and Accreditation Council) accreditation is a statutory certificate of conformity by higher education institutions with prescribed standards of quality of service, which builds credibility and trust for the students, parents, and other stakeholders. This accreditation process can be explained in Service Quality Theory, which puts the assumption that the perceived service quality, in this case, education, has a significant influence on consumer satisfaction and trust. Higher educational institutions, by means of proper accreditation, are placed as trustworthy service providers, enhancing not only internal processes but also external perceptions of service quality. With rapid industrial changes due to globalization and digitalization, the tertiary education sector must change through reforms, mergers, and partnerships, which create challenges and opportunities for the sector. Such changes, as emphasized in Human Capital Theory, recognize the central role of education institutions in driving economic development. Human Capital Theory posits that learning and expertise acquired through tertiary education make a major contribution to the performance of a country economically because an educated workforce is better able to innovate and be productive (Volchik et al. 2018). The changing forces in universities,

characterized by globalization and technological shift, necessitate institutions to prioritize the improvement of the quality of services if they are to be viable.

Students are central to the perceived service quality model, which is central to an understanding of how students assess their education experience. Students as global citizens are not only positioning themselves for individual career success but also are anticipated to be working for a higher purpose. They not only contribute to their achievement but also to the overall socio-economic patterns to which they get attuned. Therefore, the quality of education as framed by parameters like NAAC accreditation contributes significantly towards how students value their education, thus influencing their confidence and belief in the education establishments they study in (Billaiya et al., 2017).

This study uses a theoretical framework that combines Service Quality Theory, Human Capital Theory, and Perceived Service Quality to examine how NAAC accreditation impacts students' service quality perceptions and their trust in the institutions, and wider socio-economic implications in the higher education sector in Madhya Pradesh, India.

2.1.1 Internationalization of Higher Education

According to the modern internationalization models, it is very easy to understand that the process goes much beyond the mere mobility of personnel or students across borders. The nature of internationalization is that it is within the overall environment of the system of higher education, where the intersection of market forces, state regulation, and institutional policy occurs. Though internationalization has broadly been explained under the mobility of scholars paradigm, it captures broader aspects of transnational collaborations, association, and rising use of technology towards facilitation of learning globally (Kehm, 2007). It is this intricate network of forces that redefines the very essence of higher education institutions, with repercussions spreading to access to education, equity, and quality.

The economic elements cannot be overstated in this context. As noted by Jiang (2008), the export of education has also become a significant economic driver for the majority of countries, with international students delivering the local economy with tuition fees, living allowance, and cultural exchange. This heightened reliance on foreign students as

a source of revenue has led some schools to develop internationalization as a main strategic objective. But this transformation into market-oriented internationalization poses a risk of the commercialization of education, with financial concerns on occasion taking precedence over academic and pedagogical objectives. Internationalization thus yields economic advantages but simultaneously creates a conflict between the commercialization of education and its intrinsic academic values.

Additionally, as pointed out by Damme (2001), the acceptance of foreign qualifications remains a persistent issue in internationalization. While students are able to move freely between institutions or countries, the acceptance of their degrees and credits tends to be a bureaucratic and policy-based issue. Variations in academic levels and institutional accreditations complicate the recognition process, leading to inconsistencies in the perception of qualifications across the world. This is particularly so in regions where there is no harmonization of educational standards and accreditation systems. The development of international agreements and frameworks for mutual recognition of qualifications is thus an ongoing process, which is at the core of internationalization efforts succeeding. These shifts in structure within institutions of higher education also attest to the pervasive impact of internationalization. De-monopolization of the public university, de-institutionalization of learning, and de-nationalization of policy all reflect how globalization and internationalization are reshaping the academic landscape, Kehm (2003) states. Higher education has traditionally been a state-led enterprise, where there has been a national agenda for providing education and research. The forces of globalization have instead created new arrangements of educational governance, where transnational educational cooperation, private colleges, and the for-profit mode of delivery make a strong impact. This de-monopolization undermines the public education image as a public good and raises issues of the social responsibility of schools.

Similarly, the de-institutionalization of pedagogy and education systems emphasizes the further fragmentation of the delivery of education. The growth of e-learning, MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses), and cross-border education partnerships has made learning

no longer be confined to conventional institutional boundaries. The flexibility of pedagogical approaches and the pervasive use of technology make possible greater variety in education but also pressure traditional notions about what a "degree" is or what constitutes an "institution." The end product is more decentralized and accommodating learning that broadens access but also creates tension over quality, accreditation, and fairness.

Finally, de-nationalization of policy highlights the shift from purely national models of controlling higher education. With more countries participating in global partnerships and collaborations, higher education policy has to keep pace with the international scene. This process creates a more integrated world of education where national policy has to harmonize with international norms and conventions. But the coming together of national interests with international educational norms is not always harmonious. Countries too often are left in between exercising sovereignty over their education system and complying with global laws or pacts that ensure the promotion of global standards.

The convergence among these change processes and internationalization ultimately dictates what the future will hold for higher education. How much internationalization offers a wealth of possibilities—enhanced culture exchange, international cooperation on an increased level, and economic progress—it presents realistic challenges too. These include the assurance of qualifications, maintaining academic standards, dealing with the commercialization of higher education, and adapting institutional models to a rapidly evolving global environment. The four biggest domains of change induced by internationalization—economic, structural, academic, and policy-related—are interrelated and are in a process of constant motion, as Kehm (2003) identifies. Dealing with these changes involves a delicate balance between strengthening global partnership and sustaining fundamental principles in higher education. Internationalization is therefore an evolving process that is driving critical change within the higher education system. While it has the potential for increased globalization and scholarly exchange, it is also driving the need for close watching of equity, access, and quality issues to make sure that internationalization serves all stakeholders. And as the higher education systems themselves evolve to respond to

these pressures, they must remain flexible, open, and responsive to the interdependent, complex world internationalization has created.

2.1.2 Higher Educational Policy and Governance

Higher education governance has become a central concern, not only for the inner workings of the university but also for their larger social functions and roles. From Kennedy (2003), what kind of university is governed in what way, in what direction they move, and what sort of values are promoted sends powerful messages about what they do as institutions in society. Governance directly affects how institutions respond to social need, how they engage external stakeholders, and how they reconcile their educational mission with the imperatives of the market and government.

One of the builtin dilemmas of higher education governance is how to maintain a delicate equilibrium between autonomy and accountability.In most countries, mainly in the developing world, there has been a concerted effort to grant universities more autonomy. This change, as stated by Pandey (2004), is meant to give higher education institutions greater autonomy that will enable them to respond more effectively to the evolving needs of society and the economy. Increased autonomy gives universities freedom to make more independent choices in curriculum matters, research focuses, and management of finance to empower them to be more reactive and adaptive to outside forces. This autonomy also allows universities to innovate, capture human capital, and engage more actively in international partnerships.

With the greater degree of autonomy, however, comes the greater expectation of accountability. As public institutions, they still remain accountable to governments, taxpayers, and society as a whole. This double requirement for autonomy and accountability has resulted in new governance systems, where universities are being asked to be more accountable and outcomes-oriented. Reforms to improve the governance structures of universities constitute a shift in the responsibility balance between higher education institutions and governments. The governments are stepping back from involvement in

management on a day-to-day basis but remain in charge of finance, policy, and ensuring that higher education conforms to national interests.

Public-private partnerships (PPPs) are also increasingly shaping the governance of higher education. Fumasoli (2015) argues that such collaborations aim to increase the social contribution of universities as well as develop socio-economic development at both national and regional levels. Through collaboration with private sector institutions, universities can tap into additional resources, facilitate the commercialization of research, and promote innovation-driven growth. Universities can focus not only on education but also on economic growth through such collaborations, contributing to the prosperity and competitiveness of society in the global market.

Furthermore, higher education governance is being reshaped by sweeping changes in political management. Braun (1999) suggests that managerialism and new public management (NPM) influence is evident in the trend towards more market-oriented systems of governance. NPM, which is efficiency, performance measurement, and customer satisfaction-centered, has reformed the conventional models of governance in higher education. This transformation has caused universities to adopt business-like strategies, where decision-making is becoming increasingly influenced by fiscal concerns, and where scholarly agendas are often merged with market forces.

Against these changes, several new governance models are being debated in the literature. Austin (2018) outlines four major models that capture the changing governance arrangements of higher education:

Responsibility-Centered Management (RCM): This is a system that decentralizes budget-making and financial decision-making, with more authority over budgets and generating revenue at the departmental or unit level. RCM calls for universities to be entrepreneurial and independent, with departments being held accountable for their bottom line. While the system spurs efficiency and fiscal autonomy, it is criticized as potentially generating internal disparity and tension between departments.

The Entrepreneurial University: This is the model which addresses the increasing pressure on universities to become more entrepreneurial in doing research, teaching, and

community service. Universities which adopt this model aggressively seek extraneous funding, even from the private sector, and prioritize research commercialization and intellectual property generation. This entrepreneurial type of university is able to become more adaptive and economically independent financially but could come at a price in altering the academic mission to emphasize more on applied research and profit-generation endeavors.

The Commercialization of Technology and Knowledge Transfer: This model is centered around the idea that universities must become directly engaged in the commercialization of knowledge through patents, start-ups, and industry partnerships. Through innovation and translating research into product or service offerings, economic growth and job creation can be spurred by universities. The model itself is challenging regarding whether such commercialization can produce conflicts of interest between business and academic research and whether the emphasis on commercialization can contaminate academic integrity.

The University's Contribution to Regional Economic Development: In this scenario, universities are seen as key drivers of regional economic growth and development. By orienting itself to the regional and local agenda, a university is able to assist in creating a skilled workforce, entrepreneurship, and regional innovation systems. The model emphasizes the role of the university as anchors of the local development process, with there being a close connection between their activities and the needs of the local communities.

These newer models capture the fluidity of governance within higher education and the increasing significance of having university strategy aligned with larger societal and economic objectives. While the focus on entrepreneurialism and market-oriented strategies can assist universities in becoming more financially sustainable, they also pose challenges around the commercialization of education, fairness in access, and the risk of marginalizing non-market-oriented academic endeavors. As universities adjust to these changing governance arrangements, they will have to walk a delicate line between their historic academic roles and the imperatives of an increasingly competitive, globalized world.

In summary, higher education governance is experiencing a deep-seated change, fueled by expanding autonomy, new managerialism, and the increasingly prominent role of public-private partnerships. The new governance patterns mirror the shifting expectations of what universities are supposed to do to contribute to society's development, economic advancement, and innovation. Yet, as universities adopt these new patterns, they should be cautious not to lose sight of the nuances and difficulties involved in weighing autonomy, accountability, and their general social obligations.

2.1.3 E-Learning and Technology Integration in Higher Education

The application of information and communication technologies (ICTs) is transforming tertiary education worldwide, transforming teaching, learning, and management. Through the process of addressing dynamic reforms, the use of educational technologies has become part of the solution to improving the overall learning experience (Stoltenkamp, 2012). However, despite this alteration, the overarching issue remains: many university management teams are low in motivation and inspiring teachers to adopt ICT in their teaching (Asad et al., 2021). This lack of motivation typically originates from concerns about lacking resources and a shortage of digital competence among educators.

Application of technology within HEIs, particularly at more advanced education levels such as the University of the Western Cape, signifies an inclusive approach to implementation of e-learning. Stoltenkamp (2012) adds that integration effectively requires both strategic planning and financial commitment, particularly within institutions that undertake massive education reform. One of the significant features of this transformation is that it builds the communication between the students and the teachers stronger, which invites more interactive, participatory, and engaging learning experience. Technology can bridge gaps between teachers and learners and bring in a dynamic learning environment where collaboration and interaction are fostered (Georgina & Hosford, 2009).

In terms of learning support, technologies aim not only to facilitate communication but also to build learning communities (Olapiriyakul & Scher, 2006). These learning communities are crucial to the student's development and provide a platform where students

can interact beyond the traditional class room. Technology literacy, however, is strongly associated with the effective application of pedagogy with technology, which underscores the necessity of continuous professional development for faculty. It is the responsibility of institutions to see to it that the instructors possess the necessary expertise in order to effectively integrate ICT into the learning environment. Hence, while e-learning can revolutionize learning, it is essential that universities provide both the incentive as well as the facilitation for the faculty to embrace these technologies on a grand scale.

2.1.4 Institutional Ranking and Reputation

Ranking of universities is now a primary driver of institution reputation, establishing how the institution is perceived by the potential students as well as firms. More prominent rankings can widen the exposure of a university and invite international collaborations, which are key to enhancing scholarly progress and establishing institution prestige. As Šarupiiūtė (2018), rankings have the potential to generate positive images of a university's excellence, making it part of the best institutions in the world. Though these kinds of rankings have their negative side too: they identify academic and scientific areas of underperformance, which may be negative to the public image of the university if it performs poorly.

The effect of rankings on university policy is profound. While high rankings may enhance global prestige and entice more scholarly and economic alliances, they also attract greater expectations and pressure. Leading universities are forced to balance their academic procedures and policies increasingly with global standards in recruitment, promotions, and evaluation. The harmonization also typically demands gigantic governance and organisational culture reform to maintain the world expectation of high rank (Véliz, 2022).

Interestingly, universities don't just take rankings at face value but employ them strategically. Universities can modify their strategies to improve rankings and leverage them in order to recruit better-performing students, employees, and funders. Rankings provide universities with a tangible indicator of success which they can use to seek out resources, partners, and investment. Hence, while rankings are a measure of institutional performance,

they also cause universities to concentrate on a narrow range of outcomes at the expense of education in general.

The two-sided nature of rankings—as an instrument for improvement and as a cause of worry—demonstrates the way in which universities manage the global competitive environment. While they are a potential source of pride, rankings also influence the strategic choices of university leaders, ranging from academic agendas to faculty hiring. The balancing act between employing rankings as a spur for institutional growth and maintaining academic integrity remains a delicate task for most HEIs.

Technology integration at the level of higher education and institutional ranking, both fueled by rankings, are encompassed under the broader structure of education global competitiveness. Institutions, when they incorporate technology in learning and teaching environments, are also capable of boosting their capability for upgrading rankings, especially when they adopt innovation in pedagogy. Technology integration allows for a more active, inclusive, and globally networked learning culture that is the most coveted in world rankings of universities. Furthermore, universities that have invested in e-learning and technology are more likely to meet the demands of the digital age, further boosting their reputation as leading-edge, cutting-edge institutions. However, as suggested, there are pitfalls with technology usage. Universities have to reconcile pressure for innovation with demands for resource control and human development. Additionally, pressure for high scores in global rankings may make universities prioritize technology adoption-weighted stats and quantifiable metrics, which at times impedes the larger goal of developing critical thinking, social consciousness, and well-rounded learning. Thus, there is a constant tension between the force of technological innovation and institutional magnificence, both of which tend towards the prestige of a university within the international academic community.

In the end, as higher learning institutions continue to evolve to meet the pace of technological advancements and the pressure of global rankings competitiveness, their ability to meet both pressures will set their future roles in shaping the education sector and maintaining their pertinence to society.

2.2 Theory of Reasoned Action and NAAC Accreditation

The National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC), set up as an independent body of the University Grants Commission (UGC) in 1994, has a vital role to play in promoting the quality of instruction, learning, and research in Indian higher education institutions (HEIs). NAAC is entrusted with evaluating and accrediting Indian colleges and universities, continuously upgrading its evaluation mechanisms through field exposure, collaboration with overseas quality assurance agencies, and the evolving picture of higher education. In tune with its vision, NAAC seeks to internalize quality assurance as an inalienable component in the activity of all HEIs (Aithal et al., 2016).

The TRA model provides a description of the role of HEIs' intentions towards accreditation determined by attitudes and subjective norms. Attitudes with regard to NAAC accreditation imply the institution's perception of accrediting benefits such as enhancing institutional image, enhancing educational quality, and promoting ongoing development.The subjective norms are the anticipations of various stakeholders' groups—students, parents, alumni, and teachers—on an institution to make decisions regarding pursuing or maintaining accreditation. The combination of these forces the institution's behavior towards pursuing accreditation, which influences the institution's growth, student enrollment, and reputation.

2.2.1 NAAC's Role in Improving Quality

NAAC's role in bringing about the development of the quality of higher education can be viewed through the TRA framework. According to TRA, attitudes of institutions toward the accreditation process, driven by their perceived benefits, drive their behavioral intentions in implementing NAAC's standards. As Singha (2023) stresses, effective governance and effective administration are key to assuring quality, and NAAC's evaluation process is a paradigm for institutions to review and advance their educational levels.

NAAC's continuous development and success point towards the growing behavioral intention of institutions to embrace quality assurance as a working guiding philosophy. NAAC had accredited 256 universities and 6,281 colleges, which represent 34% and 18% of India's total higher education institutions, respectively, as of March 31, 2016 (Vaghela,

2017). This extensive coverage shows that increasing organizations have developed positive feelings towards accreditation as a means of long-term change and alignment with national and international levels. This is also supported by organizations that concentrate on self-assessment, accountability, and continuous improvement (Jange, 2022).

From the TRA perspective, NAAC encourages institutions not just to measure their current performance but also to encourage an innovation climate and continuous transformation. Through assessment criteria, NAAC promotes best practices, sets standards, and promotes sustainable growth, which drive educational excellence (Zarco, 2022). As such, NAAC's effect is consistent with the TRA assumption that subjective norms and attitudes jointly affect institutional behavior towards supporting and improving standards of quality.

2.2.2 NAAC Accreditation and Its Effect on Student Enrolment and Institutional Development

The effect of NAAC accreditation on student enrollment and institutional development can be explained under the TRA framework by considering how institutions' behavioral intentions to pursue accreditation are affected by their attitudes and the subjective norms of important stakeholders. Accreditation is not just a tool of quality assurance but also a process through which institutions enhance their academic quality, instruction, facilities, and institutional culture, resulting in being more attractive to prospective students (Kumar et al., 2022).

As suggested by TRA, institutions with positive attitudes toward accreditation will invest more in process and outcome improvement, resulting in higher institutional development. Effective reaccreditation requires institutions to overcome obstacles such as developing a quality culture, adhering to government regulations, and establishing relationships with industry and other learning organizations. Effective resolution of the challenges can strengthen an institution's subjective norms because outside stakeholders such as employers, parents, and students view reaccredited institutions as credible, dependable, and in a process of continuous development (Martin, 2022).

The establishment of NAAC's revised accreditation process, with elements such as the Student Satisfaction Survey (SSS), Data Validation and Verification (DVV), and quality

benchmarking, has again strengthened the position of subjective norms in institutional practice. These new processes compel institutions to embrace evidence-based assessment, promoting greater transparency and facilitating data-driven decision-making (Patil, 2018).TRA argues that these external pressures and demands by stakeholders drive the institutions to raise their teaching, research, and overall quality of performance to bring about a more vibrant and competitive education sector.

From an enrollment point of view for students, highly accredited institutions admit more students because they are viewed as trustworthy and committed to quality. That's one end of the subjective norms that will determine the decision-making process of prospective students. Once schools have greater enrollment, they can further invest in their programs, materials, and academic quality, creating a self-sustaining cycle of growth and continued improvement, in line with the theory of TRA that intentional behavior causes positive outcomes.

2.2.3 Perceptions of Stakeholders on NAAC Accreditation

The TRA also highlights the importance of subjective norms, and this concept is evident in how different stakeholders perceive the value of NAAC accreditation. While accreditation is a universal requirement for most institutions, its importance may not always be well grasped by everyone involved, especially students. According to Parekh (2020), increased student awareness of accreditation would impact students' judgment of the quality of their educational experience, leading to increased demand for improved services, accountability of institutions, and improved learning environments. With increased awareness of this sort, TRA would be able to contend that the subjective norms among students can consequently encourage institutions to enhance their content of studies.

It is evident from studies that students' perceptions of service quality satisfaction are positively influenced by accreditation. From Annamdevula (2016), as students perceive the institution as being accredited, the levels of student satisfaction tend to be higher and thus increase students' academic achievement and loyalty. This is also in line with TRA, where favorable perceptions of the accreditation process can have a direct effect on student

satisfaction, hence supporting long-term participation and academic success. Institutions which concentrate on the development of quality educational services are able to retain students, support institutional pride, and improve overall reputation.

Non-student stakeholder perceptions, including parents, alumni, and industry professionals, also play a significant role in an institution's subjective norms. For parents, accreditation assures them that the institution has high academic standards. For graduates, accreditation maintains the value of their degrees in the job market, keeping their qualifications up to date. Industry professionals appreciate accreditation since it shows that the institution graduates students who are ready for the job market. Attitudes such as these bring into light the importance of accreditation in consolidating an institution's reputation and aligning itself with the requirements of external actors (Ravikumar, 2021).

To achieve maximum gains from NAAC accreditation, institutions must actively engage stakeholders and ensure that the process and gains in accreditation are well understood. Connecting accreditation outcomes and the interests of various stakeholders creates a conducive environment for ongoing improvement and long-term institutional development. This way, institutions can leverage the lessons of TRA to create a culture of ongoing improvement and responsiveness to stakeholder needs.

2.3 Human Society Theory: Perceived Service Quality and Consumer Confidence

With a growingly competitive environment, educational institutions are increasingly looking towards student satisfaction. This is not merely an issue of enhancing the performance of students but also of making them feel linked to the larger societal and institutional frameworks within which they operate. From Human Society Theory, society is made up of institutions that shape individual behavior and expectations. That is why the education system is both a microcosm of society dynamics and a powerful force in shaping student experiences. University administrators are supposed to design strategies not only to enhance student enrollment but also to develop better learning environments that address the social lives of students (DeShields, Kara et al., 2005; Helgesen and Nesset, 2007). Student

performance and overall university social organization in the areas of recruitment, retention, and overall satisfaction have been at the forefront of ensuring the long-term sustainability of universities. These institutions now approach student satisfaction as a central part of their competitive positioning within the global education market (Huang, Binney et al., 2012; Farahmandian et al., 2013). Human society theory can add perspective to this by explaining how education institutions get engaged in shaping not just the academic achievement but the overall social life of the students, which affects their sense of belonging, trust, and loyalty in society.

Over the last two decades, there has been a rapid pace of social, political, and technological change compelling higher education institutions to transform and adapt to such new challenges. These developments emphasize the increasing necessity to deal with service encounters and enhance perceived quality in education via a society-oriented approach (Brochado, 2009). Mzikaci (2006) identifies that emerging societal expectations have guided new practice in higher education management, and this has seen institutions evolve according to contemporary values of society for them to become relevant and successful (de Jager and Gbadamosi, 2013).

One of the longest-standing difficulties in enhancing the quality of education remains measuring student satisfaction. As Cloutier and Richards (1994) indicate, school satisfaction is a difficult but unavoidable task to pursue. From the perspective of Human Society Theory, it then becomes an issue of social dynamics—the students' experience of being part of a school society and living up to their expectations.This paper aims to explore the approaches educational institutions take to address such challenges and enhance quality improvement in higher education based on societal interactions.

2.3.1 SERVQUAL Model in Higher Education: A Sociocultural Perspective

Higher education service quality is an ever-changing phenomenon influenced by the perceptions of students as they navigate institutional structures. These perceptions, in accordance with Human Society Theory, are not just individual but are shaped by the larger societal structures that the students belong to. These are not only the university itself but also the social expectations, process of socialization, and culture of norms that condition the

student life. As proposed by Zeithaml (1987) and Zammuto et al. (1996), students' impressions are influenced by the aggregate experiences they gain through this social setting.

In the case of higher education, unlike the quality of products, which can be determined in terms of standardized criteria (e.g., functionality, durability), the quality of a service is less tangible and is subject to a variety of influences such as the performance of faculty, availability of resources, and the campus culture prevailing on the campus. These intangible characteristics have created a dynamic and complex service environment that requires advanced analysis and response. Annamdevula (2016) observes that even though there are conventional methods of assessing tangible products, worldwide standards for service quality generally, and particularly for education, are not forthcoming. The challenge is further compounded when we consider that the quality of service students experience transcends a number of aspects of their student experience, ranging from curriculum design and contact with teachers to the physical and cultural environment of the institution (Valencia-Arias, 2023).

The Gap Between Student Expectations and Experience: Bridging Social Expectations with Reality

One of the most significant issues in Human Society Theory is the understanding of how society's expectations are aligned with actual experiences. For higher education, this is about bridging the gap between students' expectations and what actually happens. Closing the gap involves understanding how the structures of society—such as the role of schools in broader socialization processes—influence students' constructs of service quality. Material features such as campus facilities and technology resources significantly influence the students' perception of service quality, according to Yousapronpaiboon (2014). The physical enhancements will only be capable of satisfying the students' aspirations if they are also capable of satisfying the broader social expectations of what is considered a "quality" learning experience. Enhancements in these areas (e.g., refurbishing buildings or incorporating state-of-the-art technology in classrooms) can make a significant difference to students' mindsets, but the enhancements have to be in sync with students' broader cultural expectations of what defines a modern-day education institution. Increased student

satisfaction is a result of the perception that their physical and social needs are being met by the university.

The Role of Intangible Factors: Reliability, Trust, and Transparency in Social Structures

Apart from physical development, intangible factors like reliability, trust, and transparency also play an important role in determining student satisfaction.From the Human Society Theory perspective, these are instances of interpersonal relation quality and interaction that the students in the learning institution undergo. The SERVQUAL paradigm identifies the importance of reliability—the institution's ability to deliver quality service time and again as a factor that drives student satisfaction. In society, students are trusting and patronize institutions with consistent and dependable behavior, which is a reflection of dependability in the academic and administrative roles of the institution. Additionally, transparency of the institution's policies and procedures increases trust and improves social relationships between students and the institution. On a Human Society Theory basis, these trust-building practices are necessary in developing an integrated and stable social system within the institution. Empirical evidence (Victor, 2024) indicates that those students who trust their university will be more inclined to form beneficial social relationships in the institution and, as such, be more satisfied and engaged. Alternatively, non-transparent institutions or failed institutions may breed distrust, discontent, and disengagement among students. Although responsiveness, empathy, and tangibility are important aspects of the SERVQUAL model, these contribute less to student satisfaction than reliability, trust, and transparency. This finding confirms the assertion that students are more critical of consistency and transparency in communication than emotional care and support, and that practices in institutions based on societal trust and reliability are essential to enhance students' satisfaction with the quality of education.

The Multi-Dimensional Nature of Service Quality in Higher Education from a Societal Standpoint

Enhancing and knowing quality of service in higher education is a complex, multi-dimensional effort that necessitates tackling both intangible and tangible elements impacting

perceptions of the students. According to Human Society Theory, satisfaction among students is not just a matter of the individual; it is highly embedded within the institutional social processes and structures. The education institutions aware of the role played by society elements—trust, transparency, and reliable provision of services—are capable of responding more effectively to meet the students' expectations. While the improvement of physical facilities, whether class upgrade or offering student facilities, is important, it is intangible aspects such as reliability, trust, and transparency of institutional processes that are more critical to affecting overall student satisfaction. Institutions that establish positive social relationships, display reliability, and communicate with students in an open manner create a more engaging and nurturing learning environment consistent with broader societal expectations. Through its concentration on these main areas, universities are able to close the gap between expectations and experience in terms of student satisfaction, towards a more satisfying social environment at the institution as well as an enhanced reputation in the larger society.

2.3.2 Determinants of Perceived Service Quality Using Human Society Theory

The Parasuraman et al. (1998) SERVQUAL model is a well-established measure applied to examine service quality in terms of defining five key dimensions: Tangibles, Reliability, Responsiveness, Assurance, and Empathy. These five dimensions can be used in the context of higher education to measure how the service quality directly contributes to student satisfaction, perceptions, and overall student engagement with an institution. When viewed in terms of Human Society Theory, these dimensions are transformed into a framework for interpreting the underlying social relations between higher education institutions, students, and society as a whole. According to this framework, perceived service quality is more than just transactional exchanges and is about trust-building, social ties, and enduring relationships.

Tangibles

The Tangibles dimension involves the physical attributes that symbolize an institution's service quality. In higher education, this would encompass the campus facilities,

i.e., buildings, classrooms, libraries, and the general image of the institution and its employees. Although Tangibles are perhaps less vital in knowledge-based industries such as education (Lee et al., 2000), they do play a significant part in influencing first impressions and developing a sense of credibility. Under Human Society Theory, these physical factors are a first contact point between the institution and the students. A clean, contemporary campus has the potential to create an impression of professionalism and responsiveness, leading to trust among prospective students. The physical factors thus become symbols that indicate the institution's capability to offer a supportive learning environment and personal development.

Reliability

Higher educational institution reliability here means that such an institution delivers on time or as scheduled, guaranteed services consistently. These range from offering scheduled classes in good time to predictable timings and academic supporting systems. Such reliability, among other things, helps guarantee student academic programmes, counselling, and facilities that translate to a positive attitude and self-trust, which ensures confidence to deliver accordingly while a student for their duration on campus. Reliability, in Human Society Theory, is viewed as critical in creating trust between institutions and students. Institutions that always deliver what they have promised build a social contract that the students can rely on. Reliability in this context does not just build the reputation of the institution but forms an enduring relationship in which students can trust that their educational needs will be addressed in the long run, resulting in enhanced retention and satisfaction.

Responsiveness

The Responsiveness facet addresses the willingness and capacity of the institution to respond to its students' needs, offering quick solutions to issues like academic inquiries or technical issues. Higher learning institutions should be quick to respond to the needs of students, either through faculty availability, administrative assistance, or academic advice. Through Human Society Theory, responsiveness has been seen as one of the major driving factors in building effective interpersonal relationships within the institution. When

institutions respond quickly to the needs and concerns of their students, they create an environment of trust and respect. Students are made to feel heard and valued, and this encourages their sense of belonging and satisfaction with the institution. Responsive institutions foster a culture of engagement where students are encouraged to voice their opinions and are sure that they will be heard.

Assurance

Assurance refers to the institution's faculty and staff knowledge, skills, and professionalism, which in turn builds students' confidence and trust. In university education, this facet gives priority to qualifications and experience of instructors and their ability to stimulate and motivate students. In Human Society Theory, trust is a key factor in the building of relationships between the students and the institution. Students who believe that they have teachers who are competent, caring, and trustworthy will commit themselves more fully to their studies. Assurance builds social capital in academia where students are comfortable knowing that they are being educated by professional personnel. Assurance is not only significant for student satisfaction but also for long-term affiliation with the institution.

Empathy

Empathy in higher education refers to individualized concern and care that the institution extends to its students. This may include specially trained academic advising, mentorship, and merely an awareness sensitivity to students' individual learning styles and requirements. In Human Society Theory, empathy is an integral component of healthy interpersonal relationships and is key to building trust and respect for one another. Institutions that prioritize empathy create a culture where students are listened to, understood, and nurtured. By acknowledging the unique situations and challenges facing students, institutions demonstrate a commitment to ensuring their well-being. The result is an educational setting that is not only intellectually stimulating but emotionally and sociably supportive as well, which ultimately leads to greater student satisfaction and to a more solidified student-institution relationship.

Service Quality and Student Satisfaction

In higher education, the quality of teaching is the best driver of student satisfaction, as it impacts the learning process directly. As noted by Pheunpha (2019), the quality of teaching, qualifications of educators, and relevance of the course material are the most critical variables in determining the perception of students towards their institution. This is consistent with Human Society Theory, which emphasizes that the quality of social interactions—here, the student-teacher relationship—is essential in determining educational institution success and sustainability. Good instruction generates trust, engagement, and satisfaction, and is thus a major driver in enhancing overall service quality. While supervision has been found to have a weaker direct impact on student satisfaction, it remains an essential component of the learning process. Effective supervision ensures that students are offered the direction and feedback they need for academic and personal growth. However, pedagogy improvement, student engagement, and feedback mechanisms may have more effects on student satisfaction, suggesting that institutions focus on enhancing the learning experience through more engaging and individualized teaching styles.

Demographic Drivers of Perceived Service Quality

Demographic factors, such as gender, age, and level of education, also influence students' quality expectations for service. Sumaedi et al.'s (2012) research shows that male and female students may have different expectations regarding social services and amenities. Social spaces and co-curricular activities, for example, may be important to one gender but not to the other. In addition, students at different stages in their college lives have different expectations of service—seniors, for instance, might most highly value career services, while freshmen would most highly value academic help and social integration. Grounded in a Human Society Theory, understanding such demographic differences enables institutions to tailor their offerings to meet the needs of a diverse student population. By recognizing that each group has its own particular challenges, institutions can better address the learning experience and develop stronger, more inclusive relationships with students.

Using the incorporation of the SERVQUAL model and Human Society Theory, we are able to understand that service quality in universities is not just a matter of delivering efficient services but also of relationship building and trust between the students and the institution. Institutions that focus on reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy build strong social bonds with students, leading to higher satisfaction, retention, and long-term success. By meeting the varied needs of their students, institutions can establish an environment in which students feel appreciated, cared for, and assured of their learning experience. This integrated strategy for service excellence ensures that institutions are not merely delivering better-quality education but also a caring and inclusive community that supports the well-being and achievement of all students. By paying close attention to these factors, institutions can greatly build their reputation, deepen their relationships with students, and position themselves for success in the highly competitive and globalized higher education marketplace.

2.3.3 Societal Determinants that Affect Consumer Trust in Higher Education

Human Society Theory emphasizes the interdependent character of individuals, institutions, and society, situating students' decisions to attend higher education as not discrete but interrelated. The decisions are shaped by both the societal arrangements, which are the environment of the institution, and human minds, which are individual perceptions, interrelating in a complex web that defines the student life. In this view, consumer confidence in institutions of higher education is determined not just by personal factors like standards of education but also complexly embedded in the social construct of the learning system, where institutional reputation, trust, and social identity are crucial.

The decision to attend a higher education institution is driven by a number of factors that can be categorized into six themes: student attitude, access and opportunity, learning environments, quality of faculty, course design, and graduate outcomes. Combined, these forces drive the manner in which students perceive an institution and, subsequently, make a decision on whether or not to enroll. Of these, students' perception is a very powerful force, especially in for-profit private institutions, which follow a market model. These institutions

must have an excellent and positive perception so that they can attract prospective learners. From Human Society Theory, it is reasonable in the sense that student decisions are highly influenced by their social life, institutional prestige, and environment signals that develop a public estimate of the quality of the institution (Shah et al., 2013).

The reputation of the institution is the centerpiece around which decision-making revolves. With increasing globalization of tertiary education, students decide on universities based on incomplete information, usually in the absence of firsthand access to the campus or community. Human Society Theory predicts that this speaks to the power of social structures such as reputation, branding, and external perceptions over one's decision. These impressions, shaped by reputation, branding, and social cues, then become central to the students' decisions, showing the extent to which social expectations and societal trust play in defining how institutions are assessed. The explosion of social media, digital platforms, and word-of-mouth then compounds this process, whereby students form judgments on the basis of online ratings and an institution's reputation before they ever set foot on campus. Hence, the image communicated by an institution becomes paramount not just for enrolling students, but for creating confidence within the larger social structure.

Within this social structure, the brand identification-trust-student loyalty linkage becomes crucial. Human Society Theory postulates that trust underlies all social relationships, and in the context of higher education, it is the link between initial attraction on the basis of institutional reputation and long-term commitment on the basis of personal and academic satisfaction. The student-institution relationship is dynamic and evolves with the passage of time as the student becomes familiar with the institution and develops a sense of belonging. This trust-building process is ongoing, echoing broader social processes in Human Society Theory, where persistent interaction produces heightened levels of commitment. Chen (2017) suggests that trust is not one decision but rather a lengthy process that invites further social bonding, resulting in enhanced retention and academic performance.

This concept of trust and engagement also has specific effects on student satisfaction and institutional achievement. The more students feel integrated into the social life and academic environment of the institution, the more satisfied they will be. It is argued that,

according to Human Society Theory, the higher the degree of people's interconnectedness with institutions in society in an institution, the greater the sense of belonging will be, thus the greater their level of satisfaction. Besides, students who are content with the experience will engage in positive word-of-mouth communication, enhancing the institution's position in the greater society. Institutions thus, apart from gaining the boost in their position, generate a social feedback loop that fortifies their presence in the competitive space.

In addition, Human Society Theory acknowledges individual self-perception as being part of the complete institutional framework. The students' belief is not only influenced by the academic value of the courses but also by whether they believe they can do it. Pre-entry programs with the focus on enhancing the scholarly self-confidence of students—that they can succeed at their scholarly work—plays a significant role in their aggregate self-confidence. Such programs form an integral part of the social structure that enhances the students' integration into post-compulsory education. When students perceive that they are adequately prepared to meet the demands of university life, their confidence in their academic ability rises, leading to higher satisfaction levels. This self-efficacy aspect is an important social construct since it influences the way students respond to both the academic and social expectations placed upon them by the institution and society in general.

In addition, the theory of social identity is also essential in comprehending how students view their position in the institution. Human Society Theory emphasizes that identity is constructed socially and determined by the groups to which an individual belongs. In university, students are not only learning academically but also constructing their social identity. When students believe that their social and personal identities match the institution's values and culture, their sense of belonging becomes reinforced, thus enhancing their academic self-confidence and general satisfaction. Pennington et al. (2018) contend that strong academic self-efficacy and positive social identity are major predictors of overall student satisfaction. Therefore, the alignment between individual and institutional values contributes to a stronger, more positive student experience.

The interconnectedness of variables like trust, student perception, academic self-efficacy, and institutional reputation illustrates the complexity of fostering consumer

confidence in higher education. According to Human Society Theory, these factors cannot be viewed in isolation, as they are deeply interrelated and shape the broader social dynamics within the educational system. Institutions that effectively balance these factors—by cultivating trust, encouraging self-efficacy, and maintaining congruence with students' social identities—are likely to excel in the global marketplace that is increasingly competitive. The development of a supportive, open, and dynamic context for students not only enhances their personal success but also enhances the long-term viability and standing of the institution in society.

In summary, Human Society Theory presents a model that explains how several factors in society—institutional reputation, student perception, trust, and social identity—cross-influence to shape student choice and consumer faith in higher education. By examining these interlinked variables, institutions of higher learning can increase student satisfaction, boost retention rates, and solidify their reputation among the wider societal context, assuring their competitiveness in an environment of higher education. Those institutions that manage these intricate relationships will establish long-term commitment and trust, and the students and the institution will prosper as a result.

2.3.4 Trust and Transparency in Higher Education from a Societal Perspective

There has been mounting pressure on higher education institutions to be more transparent and accountable over the last few years, with employers, teachers, and students alike demanding more information on how they operate and the worth they can provide (Jongbloed, 2018). It is caused by rising tuition fees, frustrating retention and graduation figures, and concerns about graduates' readiness in the job market (Leveille, 2006). They highlight how important it is for institutions of higher learning to demonstrate themselves as effective and valuable, not only to prospective students but to society at large. Transparency has thus become a critical factor in establishing trust among institutions of higher learning and the general public.

Transparency serves two purposes in establishing trust in higher education. First, it impacts trust directly, and secondly, it impacts it indirectly by increasing student satisfaction.

Evidence suggests that transparent practice institutions will be more likely to be trusted by students and other stakeholders, but this has an increased effect when transparency leads to positive experiences among students. That is, students are likely to trust an institution when they are content with the overall experience that they have, and transparency plays a very big role towards the creation of that experience (Medina, 2015). This would mean that institutions not only need to give transparent and clear information about how they operate but also need to offer good, enriching experiences for their students that promote their academic development and personal satisfaction. In some sense, however, transparency alone is insufficient; it must be accompanied by action aimed at the maximization of student happiness and satisfaction.

Secondly, transparency becomes imperative so that institutions can bring to life their dedication towards diversity and inclusiveness. Institutions open to unveiling their efforts at diversity and presenting measurable indicators of accomplishment are poised to build and sustain the trust of their diverse stakeholders. With institutions actively reporting their efforts towards inclusivity, they are perceived as more trustworthy, particularly among students who value diversity and are in search of learning environments that align with their values (Pepper et al., 2010). The connection between openness and trust not only enhances the learning experience of the students but also enhances the reputation of an institution in the broader academic community. By associating their behavior with social purposes, institutions can legitimate more effectively their efforts at diversification, having stronger relationships with teachers, students, and the broader society.

In practical terms, the potential of transparency is underappreciated, particularly with regard to making electronic data on services and teaching quality easily available. For instance, students usually do not really know the wealth of data at their disposal or how knowing such information can influence the manner in which they perceive an institution as open. Yet research finds that the global reach and size of larger institutions can in itself prove to be beneficial in affecting perceptions of openness. Larger institutions, especially those with global presence, are viewed as more transparent because they have the resources and ability to give detailed information across the world (Ramírez, 2024). This research suggests that

institutions with broad scope are in a better position to disclose their values, achievements, and programs in an open manner, hence enhancing their credibility and trustworthiness. The interface between institutional size, exposure on the global scale, and openness is of highest significance in the context of increasing globalization in the higher education sector.

Larger institutions, with their ample resources and exposure to the international arena, are best placed to impose open strategies on themselves. These can include publishing data on educational achievements, student satisfaction levels, and diversity initiatives. The ability to demonstrate transparency at the international level contributes more to their reputation and makes them more trustworthy to local as well as foreign stakeholders. Moreover, students who learn from these institutions tend to find them more reliable and committed to delivering good quality education, which makes them even more confident about the institution. Transparency is not merely about opening up institutional processes, finally; it's about building an environment for openness and accountability, one that motivates and sustains trust.

Those institutions that employ transparency as a core value—through the open sharing of academic services, diversity initiatives, or institutional success stories—are more likely to build good and long-term relationships with students as well as other constituents. This emphasis on transparency is an ingredient in creating more robust institutional reputations, increased student satisfaction, and greater trust, all essential to long-term success in the ever-more-competitive business of higher education. By being more open in their communication, institutions can be confident they are not only meeting the needs of their students but also building on the trust and confidence of their broader community, thereby extending their legitimacy, reputation, and overall value.

2.4 Summary

The review of the literature explores some of the critical determinants of service quality perception, student satisfaction, consumer confidence, and institutional reputation in higher education. Human Society Theory in Higher Education: The review begins by addressing the way social processes examined in Human Society Theory contribute to student

satisfaction at the university. The significance of the social circumstances like trustworthiness, transparency, and reliability, came through under the theory when explaining how such traits condition students' experiences at their universities. Universities with robust interpersonal social relations within institutions whose business is conducted openly act to recognize their students' needs more completely to their benefit in a bid to enhance university prestige and overall value to the community.

Consumer Confidence Influences: A core section of the literature review is allocated to the determinants of consumer confidence in postsecondary education. Determinants include student perception, opportunity availability, quality of instructors, curriculum of courses, and graduates' success. The review emphasizes that student perception is particularly important for private for-profit institutions, which highly rely on favorable perceptions to attract prospective students. The development of trust in a brand of an institution, and the ability of an institution to offer quality education, significantly determines the commitment and overall satisfaction of the students. Trust, academic self-efficacy, and a strong congruence between the values of the institution and the identities of the students are also identified as crucial determinants of higher student retention and achievement.

Trust and Transparency in Higher Education: Transparency and trust are recognized as key elements in building healthy relations among higher education institutions and stakeholders. Transparent procedures, particularly the emphasis on an institution's commitment to diversity and inclusion, are most significant in building trust. Literature shows that openness and accountability culture creates a stronger reputation of an institution, enhances the satisfaction level of students, and is extremely essential in the current competitive global higher education market. It is most critical in international student-intended institutions whose prospective students can be swayed by online feedback and social media and fail to enroll as a consequence prior to stepping onto campus.

SERVQUAL Model and Service Quality

The paper introduces the SERVQUAL model as a means of assessing the service quality in higher education. The five major dimensions of the model—Tangibles, Reliability,

Responsiveness, Assurance, and Empathy—are central to deciding the students' perceptions and satisfaction. Though Tangibles, such as campus appearance and facilities, are important, they are of lesser significance in education, where factors like the quality of teaching are more critical. The dimensions of Reliability, Responsiveness, and Assurance all directly influence trust among students since they dictate the institution's reliability as well as responsiveness to students' academic and administrative issues. Additionally, the dimension of Empathy, which focuses on personalized concern and care, is highlighted as a major area in providing a caring study environment as well as catering to students' diverse needs.

Demographic Factors and Service Quality: The literature also speaks of how demographic factors, such as gender and study duration, influence the attitudes students have towards service quality. It points out that students at different levels of their higher education experience would have varying expectations and demands. For instance, male and female students may distinguish service quality along dimensions such as social activities and amenities. Detection of such demographic variations allows institutions to niche their products and provide more sensitive, tailored solutions, ultimately leading to greater student satisfaction.

Influence of NAAC on Institutional Reputation and Service Quality

Lastly, the literature review highlights the importance of integrating aspects like transparency, trust, service quality, and congruence with student expectations to enhance student satisfaction and the reputation of higher education institutions. These are deeply focused upon by the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC), a body that significantly influences the standards of quality in higher education in India. NAAC's accreditation process, being rigorous, not only evaluates the educational standards and institutional procedures but also promotes the culture of constant improvement in universities. NAAC-accredited institutions are also expected to maintain high standards of administration, curriculum development, faculty, and student services. This commitment to best practices provides consumer confidence and institutional reputation, giving NAAC accreditation a premium value as universities seek to compete on the international stage.

Institutions applying for NAAC accreditation are therefore encouraged to enhance the quality of their services and model their operations based on international standards, leading to increased student satisfaction, institutional image, and international competitiveness.

In summary, the effective combination of these elements—transparency, trust, service quality, and compatibility with student expectations—is pivotal not only to raising the level of student satisfaction and the prestige of higher education institutions but also in addressing the stringent standards imposed by NAAC. Institutions that are able to effectively handle these elements will improve their consumer confidence, service quality, and international competitiveness in the constantly changing higher education scenario.

CHAPTER III:

METHODOLOGY

The proposed study explores the effects of NAAC (National Assessment and Accreditation Council) accreditation on perceived service quality and consumer trust in higher educational institutions in Madhya Pradesh, India. NAAC accreditation is a critical marker for the quality of Indian higher education institutions. By measuring the impact of accreditation on the perception of service quality and consumer confidence, this study purports to explain how accreditation determines public trust in these institutions for their education services. The conclusion of this study may assist policymakers, educational officials, and stakeholders in enhancing the service quality provided by higher educational institutions in the region.

3.1 Overview of the Research Problem

The fast-changing scenario of higher education in India, especially in Madhya Pradesh, has made the institutions more required to improve their quality and attract potential students. With the rise in demand for quality education comes the need for accreditation as a tool to validate that institutions achieve set academic and infrastructural criteria. NAAC is the major accrediting agency for higher education institutions (HEIs) in India, with the responsibility of evaluating the quality of education offered by higher education institutions against a stringent set of criteria. Although NAAC accreditation is widely regarded as a quality stamp, its direct impact on perceived service quality and consumer confidence—particularly in the Madhya Pradesh, India context, is under-researched.

Madhya Pradesh, India, provides a unique context for this research, given its heterogeneous population, inter-regional disparities in educational infrastructure, and the specific challenges of institutions in non-metropolitan areas. Many higher education institutions in the state, especially those in rural or semi-urban areas, are either in the process of obtaining NAAC accreditation or have not done so yet due to economic constraints, inadequate infrastructure, or limited faculty support. Despite this, tertiary education remains in demand, as prospective students and parents increasingly seek higher education institutions

that provide not only academic excellence but also robust support services, facilities, and an overall positive student experience.

Since the state has tremendous diversity between its higher education institutions, NAAC accreditation exerts tremendous heterogeneity in affecting opinions about the service quality among the students, parents, teachers, and other interested parties. Although NAAC accreditation is normally linked to higher-quality instruction, modern facilities, and well-organized curricula, the extent to which this accreditation affects the perceived service quality—that is, such aspects as faculty competence, student support, and facilities on campus—differs across institutions. The institutions with better NAAC grades can be thought to provide better academic and non-academic services, while institutions that do not have accreditation can be perceived as being short on these facilities, impacting their reputation and student satisfaction rates.

Further, consumer confidence—the vital consideration by future students and their families about making sound judgments about where to take higher education—is possibly very susceptible to the state of accreditation within an institution. Accreditation comes with a nod as a promise of trustworthiness, commitment to quality, and validation that the organization cares for continuing improvement. However, the question arises whether NAAC accreditation alone is enough to build and maintain consumer confidence, or whether other factors such as regional reputation, faculty-student interactions, and infrastructural developments play a more substantial role in shaping consumer decisions. In the case of Madhya Pradesh, India, where institutions may be less familiar or situated in far-flung areas, students and their parents may not be aware of or exposed to the accreditation status of an institution, that could further affect their trust in such institutions.

Additionally, although NAAC accreditation is designed to promote quality enhancement and customer confidence, it also has some challenges involved in the process. Higher education institutions in Madhya Pradesh encounter challenges in integrating their practices to NAAC's high standards based on resource limitations, low research output, or old teaching pedagogies. These challenges create a disparity in the quality of education between accredited and non-accredited institutions. In turn, such gaps are likely to exacerbate the

deficit in trust between consumers and those who feel that the necessary quality can only be provided by accredited institutions. Secondly, even the process of assessment itself has at times been accused of depending too heavily on quantifiable indicators and not giving enough heed to the idiosyncratic contextual circumstances that may condition an institution's education product.

This study, therefore, attempts to examine systematically NAAC accreditation as a contribution toward the perceived service quality of institutions of higher learning in Madhya Pradesh and its impact on consumer confidence. By understanding how accreditation influences perceptions of academic quality, student satisfaction, and institutional trust, the research provides valuable insights into how state institutions of higher learning can enhance their reputation and competitiveness. Particularly, it analyses whether accredited institutions are viewed to provide better educational services and, if they are, how these perceptions lead to higher rates of student enrolment, higher satisfaction levels, and higher stakeholder trust.

Furthermore, the research also analyzes the challenges of non-accredited institutions in achieving consumer trust and how it may increase the quality of service so that they can be an effective rival to their accredited competitors. The research explores how accreditation influences stakeholders' attitudes, how institutions are reputably established through accreditation, and whether consumer confidence is more strongly related to accreditation status or other factors like faculty expertise, student performance, and campus climate. Additionally, it investigates the impact of accreditation on the institution's overall brand and how it influences the students' decision-making.

Finally, the research seeks to fill a very serious gap in the existing literature by its concentration on Madhya Pradesh, India, as the context under which the education sector has some specific issues in implementing accreditation standards. The conclusions provide valuable recommendations to policymakers, education leaders, and leadership institutions regarding how to make the best use of NAAC accreditation to enhance overall quality in higher education, foster consumer trust, and increase the reputation of education institutions in Madhya Pradesh, India. Through a more advanced understanding of the part played by

accreditation in consumer trust and perceived quality of service, this study contributes to the existing debate in Indian higher education regarding quality assurance.

3.2 Operationalization of Theoretical Constructs

Operationalization of theoretical concepts is an essential part of any research, as it converts abstract concepts into empirical variables that can be tested. NAAC Accreditation, perceived service quality, and consumer confidence in the higher education institution in Madhya Pradesh, India, are the most critical theoretical concepts in this research. They are core in explaining how NAAC accreditation influences students' perception of service quality and their overall confidence in the institution.

NAAC Accreditation is the official acknowledgement of a higher education institution's compliance with certain quality standards established by the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC). The existence or non-existence of NAAC accreditation was utilised as the main variable in the study. NAAC-accredited institutions were classified as "accredited" and non-accredited institutions as "non-accredited". The NAAC grading scale (A+, A, B, etc.) was also employed as a marker to verify the level of accreditation. The research further analyzes the effect of some of the NAAC parameters, like teaching quality, research output, infrastructure, and student services, on student perception. The impression of these is assessed on a Likert scale, such as "The institution has adequate research facilities available" or "Academic programs are properly planned according to NAAC norms."

Perceived service quality is another salient construct and measures how the students assess the quality of service being offered by their higher institutions. This is measured using the SERVQUAL model, which has five dimensions that is Tangibles, Reliability, Responsiveness, Assurance, and Empathy. Tangibles were used to measure whether the students like or dislike the infrastructure in the campuses, classrooms, libraries, and learning resources. For instance, students are required to rate their satisfaction using phrases such as "The campus is well-maintained and conducive to learning" or "The library resources are adequate and accessible." Reliability is concerned with the dependability and

consistency of academic services, e.g., timely grading and compliance with academic deadlines, using items such as "The institution consistently meets its academic deadlines." Responsiveness assesses the responsiveness of the institution to solving students' problems promptly, and examples of items for surveys will be "Faculty and staff respond to student concerns on time." Assurance probe students' faith in the quality of education and qualifications of faculty, via items like "Faculty members are highly qualified." Finally, Empathy gauges the individual attention students receive, via items like "Faculty members show concern for my academic and personal development." These are the SERVQUAL Dimension Variables for the present study:

Table 3.1:
SERVQUAL Dimension Variables

Tangible Service Variables (TSV)
Campus Infrastructure and Technology and Facilities
Learning Materials
Cleanliness and Maintenance
Reliability Service Variables (RSV)
Course Availability and Accuracy: Adherence to Promises
Timely Academic Services
Consistency in Teaching
Responsiveness Service Variables (RPSV)
Faculty Availability
Student Support Services and Resolution of Problems
Assurance Service Variables (ASV)
Security and Safety
Accreditation and Recognition
Career Prospects and Placement Assistance
Empathy Service Variables (ESV)
Extra-Curricular Engagement and Cultural and Emotional Support
Mentorship Programs

Consumer trust in higher education is an indication of their confidence in the institution in offering quality learning and long-term returns. This is based on several factors, including the name and stature of the faculty members, global recognition and exposure, and

industry connections, as these raise the institution's image and the faith of the students in their future. Brand image and advertising are responsible for positive attitudes, and innovation and research opportunities ensure the availability of current academic exposure for students. Alumni relations and student retention percentages also instill confidence by demonstrating that the university has been able to deliver long-term professional growth and student satisfaction. Other elements, such as academic freedom, use of technology, ecological sustainability, community outreach, and program flexibility, all support a comprehensive and caring environment that enhances consumer confidence. Peer influence, institutional history, customer service, health and wellness programs, experiential learning opportunities, parental support, and student diversity also significantly influence students' trust and satisfaction. These are various variables of consumer confidence:

Table 3.2:
Consumer Confidence Variables

Reputation of Faculty Members
Brand Image and Marketing
Global Exposure and Recognition
Innovation and Research Opportunities
Cultural Inclusivity
Industry Connections and Collaborations
Academic Freedom
Technological Integration
Environmental Sustainability
Flexibility and Customization of Programs
Peer Influence
Customer Service and Administrative Support
Experiential Learning Opportunities

3.3 Research Purpose and Questions

The primary goal of this study is to evaluate the effect of NAAC accreditation on perceived service quality and consumer trust in Madhya Pradesh, India. The present study attempts to analyse the influence of NAAC accreditation on service quality perception and consumer trust in the higher education institutions of the region.

Specific Objectives

To achieve the main objective, these specific objectives have been outlined:

1. To comprehend the overview of NAAC accreditation in Madhya Pradesh, India.
2. To determine the awareness and perception of students, parents, and educational stakeholders regarding NAAC accreditation in Madhya Pradesh, India.
3. To assess the impact of NAAC accreditation on consumers' selection process for higher education institutions in Madhya Pradesh, India.
4. To study and measure the SERVQUAL method of service quality in higher education institutions.
5. To evaluate the effect of NAAC accreditation on the perceived service quality and consumer confidence in higher educational institutions in Madhya Pradesh, India.
6. To compare the perceived service quality and consumer confidence of NAAC-accredited versus non-accredited institutions in Madhya Pradesh, India.
7. To identify the potential challenges faced by institutions in Madhya Pradesh, India in obtaining or maintaining NAAC accreditation.
8. To recommend ways to reduce the gap between service quality expectation and perception.

Research Question

The following research questions have been developed to meet the aims of this study:

1. Does the awareness of NAAC accreditation influence the perceptions of students and parents selecting higher education institutions in Madhya Pradesh, India?
2. Are there significant variations in service quality variables of accredited and non-accredited higher education institutions?
3. Does NAAC accreditation impact consumer confidence in higher education institutions?

4. Do the challenges faced by higher education institutions impact their ability to achieve or maintain NAAC accreditation?

5. Do students of NAAC-accredited institutions exhibit higher levels of consumer confidence compared to students of non-accredited institutions in Madhya Pradesh, India?

3.4 Research Design

Research design is the core that holds together all the aspects of a quantitative study, rendering findings valid, free from bias, and generalizable. As Trochim (2006) and Dannels (2018) describe, it is the "glue" that holds the entire research process cohesive. A good research design offers an explicit framework that helps researchers answer their research questions effectively while controlling for variance, thereby maximizing the reliability of the study. Research designs are broadly grouped under four categories—descriptive, correlational, quasi-experimental, and experimental—each chosen depending on the particular study objectives (Dulock, 1993).

According to this paradigm, Crotty (1998) assumed that building a research proposal means addressing four fundamental questions. These are: 1) What epistemological position (theory of knowledge) underpins the research (e.g., objectivism, subjectivism)? 2) What theoretical framework or philosophical stance underpins the methodology (e.g., positivism, interpretivism, critical theory)? 3) What methodology spans methods and outcomes (e.g., experimental research, survey research, ethnography)? 4) How are data to be gathered (e.g., questionnaires, interviews, focus groups)? These types of questions cause the researcher to make rational, related decisions that define the general structure of the study, in keeping with the research objectives (Creswell, 2003).

In addition to these philosophical and methodological concerns, conceptual research design involves activities such as critical thinking, cross-disciplinary sharing of knowledge, and ongoing dialogue. The outcome of this stage is the development of a "conceptual framework," which entails the research objectives (what the study will achieve), the general theories that guide the research, research questions (what will be learned as a consequence of

the study), and operationalizing the key concepts and constructs to be measured or documented during the study (Tobi & Kampen, 2018). This model links theory and practice, outlining a rational and systematic procedure for conducting the research, so that the study is both theoretically informed and methodologically rigorous.

The study adopts a quantitative research paradigm using questionnaires to gather responses from students, staff, and stakeholders of Madhya Pradesh, India. This research investigates the relationship between the NAAC accreditation status and the institutional perception of quality services and consumer trust in the respective institution. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used in analysis and inference-making about the function of NAAC accreditation.

3.5 Population and Sample

The sample population was computed by using a 95% confidence level and an error margin of 5%. Madhya Pradesh is a state in India that was legally established on 1 November 1956. Currently, Madhya Pradesh consists of 55 districts. In the proposed study, 6 districts representing over 10% of the districts were chosen. These areas—Jabalpur, Bhopal, Indore, Gwalior, Ujjain, and Katni—were selected as they have the most accredited colleges in the state. There are about 145 private colleges and 19 government colleges that are NAAC-accredited Higher Education institutions in Madhya Pradesh. The research targets 17 colleges, of which 15 are private and 2 are government colleges, representing over 10% of the total. On the total figure of the study area, accredited institutes, a required sample population of 377 respondents was selected. The sample population is enough to provide statistical strength and substantial outcomes in determining the impact of NAAC accreditation.

3.6 Participant Selection

The participants were selected by using a stratified random sampling technique, which was employed to draw a sample of different types of accredited institutions, including public and private universities and colleges. Stratification based on institution type, size, and location within Madhya Pradesh, India, will be accomplished. A random sample was selected

from each stratum to obtain a representative and diverse sample of administrative staff, faculty, parents, and students. The study involves a representative population of stakeholders from the 17 selected districts. A random sample of students provides information on their learning experience and educational attitudes. Parents provide views on education choices and ambitions. Industrialists provide views on how far the education system prepares students for the job market. Finally, academicians provide views on pedagogy, issues, and curriculum applicability. This approach attempts to present an overview of the Madhya Pradesh higher education system.

3.7 Instrumentation

The main tool for data gathering in this research is a pre-tested, formatted questionnaire intended to collect detailed information from respondents. The questionnaire was composed of a combination of open-ended and closed-ended questions, with the ability to derive both quantitative and qualitative information. The questions are particularly designed to cover such key areas as perceived service quality, institutional characteristics, and consumer confidence, in the context of changes before and after NAAC accreditation. Highlighting these areas, the questionnaire attempts to capture the impact of accreditation on accredited colleges from different perspectives.

Before the mass distribution of the questionnaire, it was pre-tested. This process is paramount to validate (measuring what it is supposed to measure) and test the reliability (giving consistent results over time) of the instrument. Pre-testing feedback was taken into consideration to refine the questionnaire to establish effectiveness in eliciting the desired data. When the data were obtained, different statistical measures were applied to test the data. Correlation tests will be applied to quantify associations between categorical variables. Regression Analysis would determine the kind and extent of relationships between variables, and ANOVA would test means among various groups. All these statistical procedures were used to test research hypotheses and make logical inferences. All these analyses were performed on SPSS 26, which is a sturdy and widely practiced statistical package. SPSS 26

helped in the effective management of complex data and provided a trustworthy platform to perform necessary statistical tests to achieve precision and validity of research findings.

3.8 Data Collection Procedures

The study uses both primary and secondary data to bring substantial outcomes. The primary data were gathered using properly designed questionnaires, which were filled out by different stakeholders, i.e., students, parents, industrialists, and academicians, from the chosen higher educational institutions. The questionnaires were prepared in a way that would gather data on different issues related to the service quality and consumer confidence variables in the higher education system. The process of data collection was four weeks and conducted online through Google Forms, with convenience and ease, depending on the technological facilities in the institutions. In addition to primary data from the surveys, secondary data were obtained from institutional reports. These institutional reports also had informative data on the status of accreditation of the colleges, NAAC evaluation scores, and service quality indicators, complementing and verifying the main data gathered from surveys. This gives an all-inclusive perception about the state of higher education in Madhya Pradesh.

3.9 Data Analysis

In the proposed study, data analysis was conducted using Microsoft Excel rather than SPSS 26. Excel was an all-around tool for handling, arranging, and analyzing the compiled data. The information gathered from the organized questionnaires was submitted to Excel, with several statistical methods being executed to make meaningful deductions. For data analysis, descriptive statistics (mean, median, mode, etc.) were utilized to summarize responses. Pivot tables and charts were also utilized to graphically represent patterns and relationships in the data. Linear Regression Analysis, Standard Deviation, Related-Samples Friedman's Two-Way Analysis of Variance by Ranks, and percentage were performed using SPSS 26 and Excel's built-in data analysis add-in or tools. These statistical techniques helped test the research hypotheses as well as measure the effect of NAAC accreditation on perceived service quality, institutional features, and consumer confidence. Utilizing

Microsoft Excel, the study enjoyed a globally accessible and easily operable environment, and data analysis became effective and hassle-free.

3.10 Research Design Limitations

The proposed study has the following research limitations:

1. The study focuses on 17 colleges, which may limit the ability to generalize findings to all institutions in Madhya Pradesh.

2. The scope of the research is restricted to Madhya Pradesh, which may affect its relevance to other states.

3. The study is limited to specific districts, which may not represent broader trends across the state.

4. Participants with limited internet access are excluded, potentially introducing bias.

3.11 Conclusion

This study adheres to research ethical guidelines in the sense that respondents are given informed consent before being engaged. The participants are assured anonymity and confidentiality, with their data secured and used solely for research. Participants are made aware of the ability to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Additionally, the study also observes ethical data collection, analysis, and reporting processes to ensure that the results remain valid if repeated, precluding manipulation or misinterpretation of findings.

CHAPTER IV:

RESULTS

4.1 Research Question One

Does the awareness of NAAC accreditation influence the perceptions of students and parents selecting higher education institutions in Madhya Pradesh, India

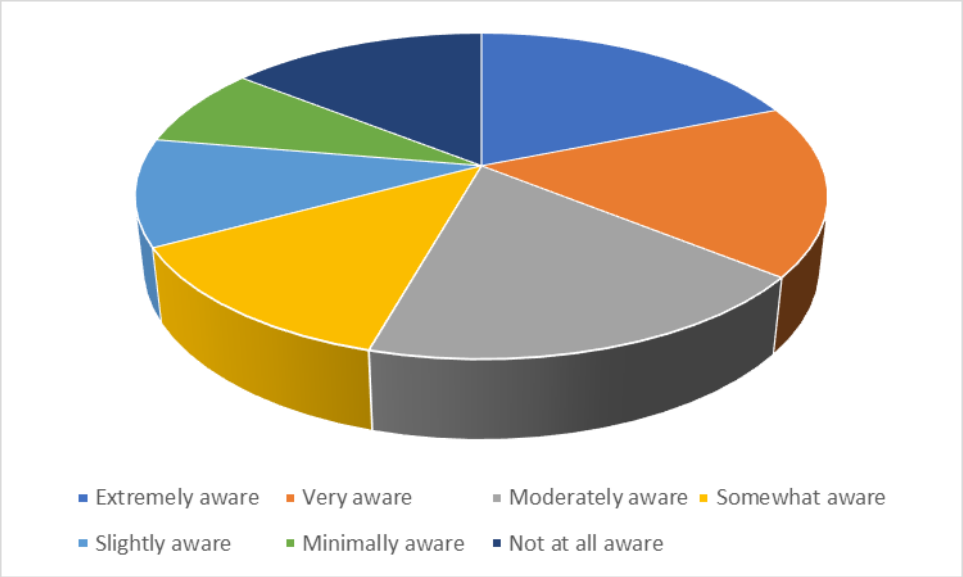
Table 4.1
Awareness of NAAC accreditation and perception of students and parents selecting higher education institutions

Awareness of NAAC accreditation	Frequency (%)	Perceptions of Stakeholders	Frequency (%)	Consider the NAAC score for Selection	Frequency (%)	NAAC accreditation influence Selection Decision	Frequency (%)
Extremely aware	19	Strongly agree		Strongly considered		Extremely influential	21
Very aware	17	Agree		Considered		Very influential	23
Moderately aware	19	Neutral		Somewhat considered		Moderately influential	22
Somewhat aware	13	Disagree		Neutral / Can't say		Neutral / No opinion	14
Slightly aware	11	Strongly disagree		Somewhat not considered		Slightly influential	7
Minimally aware	8	Not sure		Rarely considered		Rarely influential	2
Not at all aware	14	No opinion		Not at all considered		Not at all influential	11

Note: Data collected from the primary source

Table 4.1 shows the responses of stakeholders for awareness of NAAC accreditation and the perception of students and parents selecting higher education institutions while considering the NAAC score and accreditation for Selection.

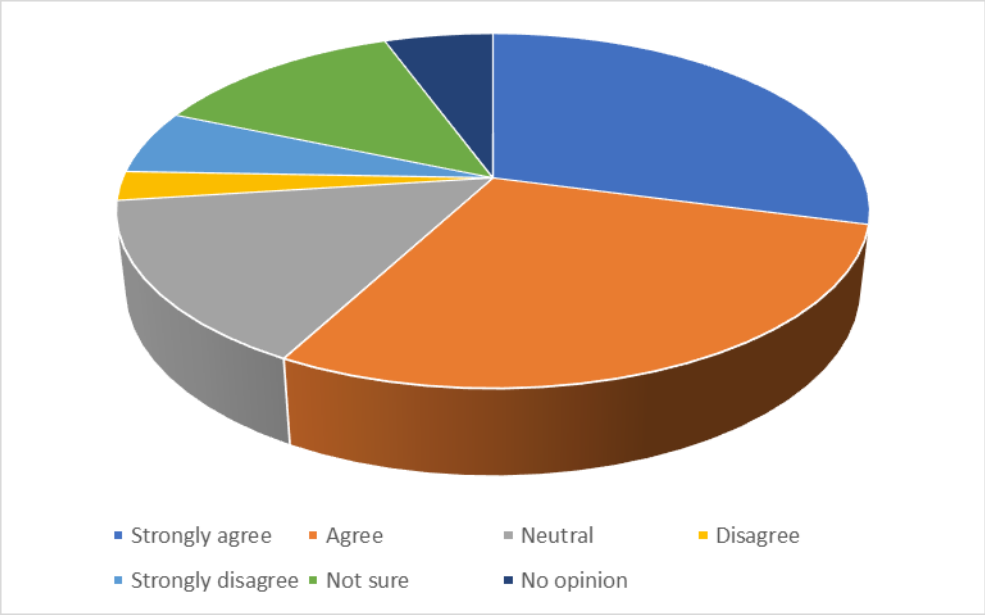
These are different Figures 4.1 to 4.4, indicating separately the awareness of NAAC accreditation.



Note*: Data collected from the primary source*

Figure 4.1

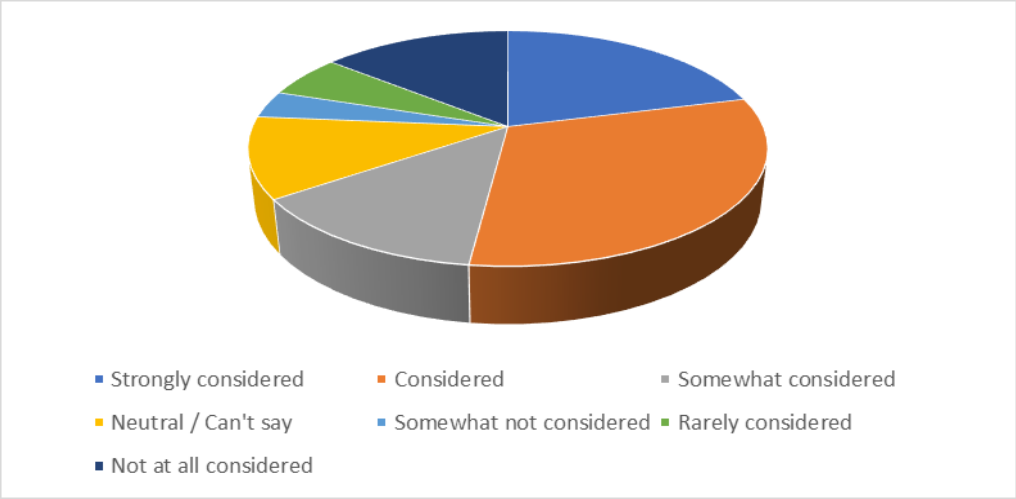
Awareness of NAAC accreditation



Note*: Data collected from the primary source*

Figure 4.2

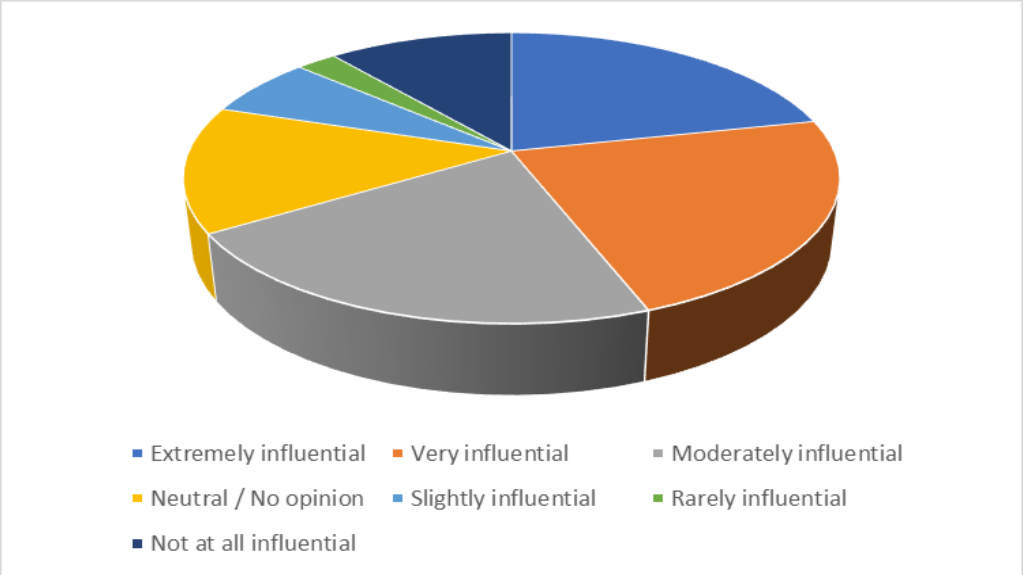
Perception of students and parents



Note: Data collected from the primary source

Figure 4.3

Consideration of the NAAC score for Selection



Note*: Data collected from the primary source*

Figure 4.4

Influence of NAAC accreditation on selection decision

Tables 4.2 to 4.5 show the summary of the Linear Regression Analysis, which was performed to test the above research question. It was found that there is a very high degree of positive correlation between the awareness of NAAC accreditation and the perception of students and parents and considering the NAAC score and accreditation influence on the selection decision of Higher Education institutions.

Table 4.4 presents that NAAC accreditation influence on selection decisions for Higher Education Institutions has a large positive standardized beta (1.059), indicating it's the

strongest predictor, where a p-value of 0.032, which is statistically significant and less than 0.05. It was found that other predictors, the Perceptions of students and parents, and considering the NAAC score during selection, have greater than 0.05 p-values.

Table 4.2
Model Summary

Model		R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics					Durbin-Watson
					R Square Change	F Change		df2	Sig. F Change	
		.920	.840	6.21472	.920	11.539	3	3	.037	1.854
a. Predictors: (Constant), NAAC accreditation influence Selection Decision, Perceptions of Stakeholders, and Consider the NAAC score for Selection										
b. Dependent Variable: Awareness of NAAC accreditation										

Note: SPSS 26

Table 4.3
ANOVA

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
	Regression	1336.989	3	445.663	11.539	.037[b]
	Residual	115.868	3	38.623		
	Total	1452.857	6			
a. Dependent Variable: Awareness of NAAC accreditation						
b. Predictors: (Constant), NAAC accreditation influence Selection Decision, Perceptions of Stakeholders, and Consider the NAAC score for Selection						

Note: SPSS 2

Table 4.4
Coefficients

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	95.0% Confidence Interval for B	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
	(Constant)	27.727	5.089		5.448	.012	11.530	43.923
	Perceptions of Stakeholders	.022	.100	.058	.218	.841	-.296	.340
	Consider the NAAC score for Selection	-.077	.151	-.175	.514	.643	-.557	.402

	NAAC accreditation influence Selection Decision	.541	.143	1.059	3.790	.032	.087	.995
a. Dependent Variable: Awareness of NAAC accreditation								

Note: SPSS 26

Table 4.5
Residuals Statistics

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Predicted Value	31.9573	69.4463	53.8571	14.92754	7
Residual	-5.35704	7.74616	.00000	4.39447	7
Std. Predicted Value	-1.467	1.044	.000	1.000	7
Std. Residual	-.862	1.246	.000	.707	7
a. Dependent Variable: Awareness of NAAC accreditation					

Note: SPSS 26

4.2 Research Question Two

Does NAAC accreditation impact perceived service quality in higher education institutions?

Table 4.6
NAAC accreditation and perceived service quality

NAAC accreditation	Frequency (In %)	Perceived Service Quality	Frequency (In %)						
			1	2	3	4	5	6	7
A++	38	Security and Safety	13	9	13	10	12	12	31
A+	10	Career Prospects and Placement Assistance	12	12	11	13	13	11	28
A	6	Faculty Availability	12	11	9	11	10	18	29
B++	4	Learning Materials	17	14	11	10	13	10	25
B+	2	Extra-Curricular	15	10	12	13	14	14	23

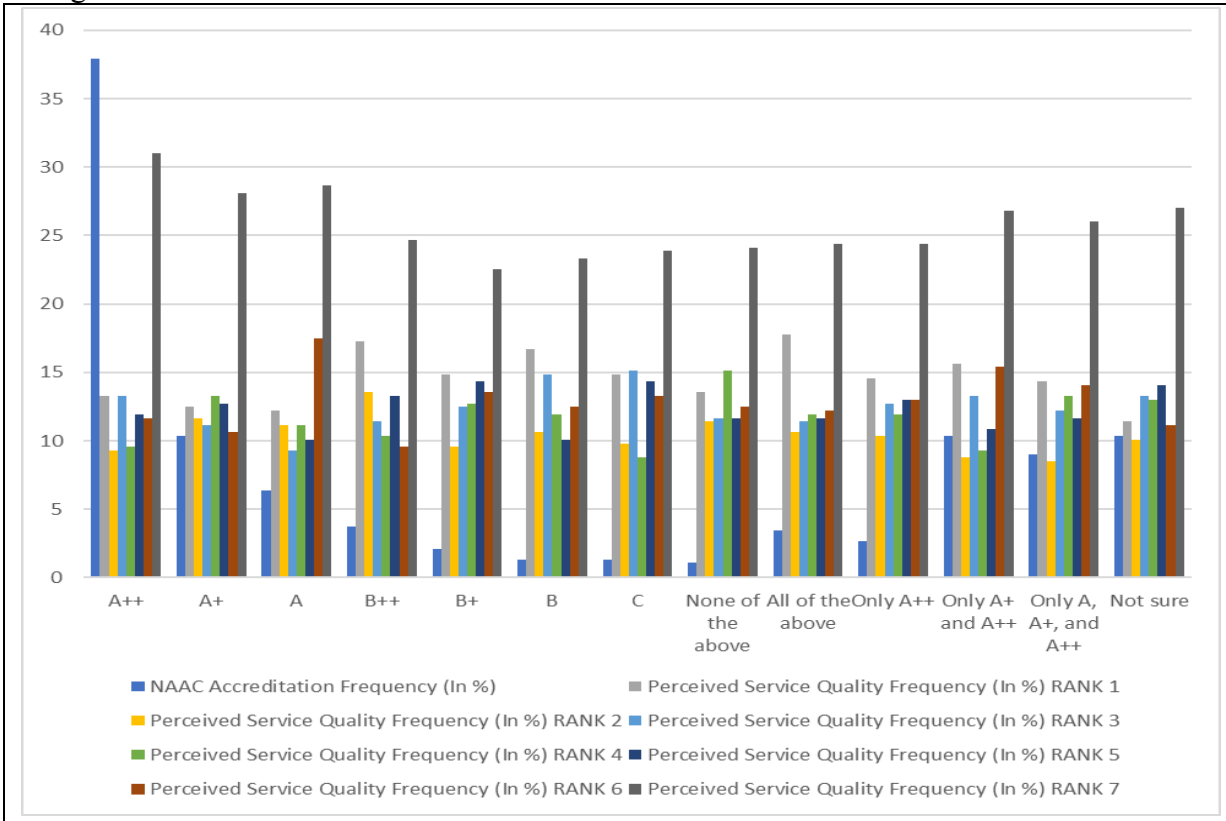
		Engagement and Cultural and Emotional Support							
B	1	Cleanliness and Maintenance	17	11	15	12	10	12	23
C	1	Mentorship Programs	15	10	15	9	14	13	24
None of the above	1	Student Support Services and Resolution of Problems	14	11	12	15	12	12	24
All of the above	3	Campus Infrastructure and Technology and Facilities	18	11	11	12	12	12	24
Only A++	3	Accreditation and Recognition	15	10	13	12	13	13	24
Only A+ and A++	10	Consistency in Teaching	16	9	13	9	11	15	27
Only A, A+, and A++	9	Course Availability and Accuracy: Adherence to Promises	14	8	12	13	12	14	26
Not sure	10	Timely Academic Services	11	10	13	13	14	11	27

Note: SPSS 26

Table 4.6 shows the various perceived service quality variables under these four categories, such as Tangible Service Variables (TSV), Reliability Service Variables (RSV), Responsiveness Service Variables (RPSV), Assurance Service Variables (ASV), and Empathy Service Variables (ESV) of Higher Education Institutions. Under these various categories, the variables of perceived service quality were selected. All the selected Higher Education Institutions belonging to different Grading categories were also included. Respondents were asked to give their feedback (in ranking pattern from **rank 1 to 7**) on various service quality variables regarding their Higher Education Institutions.

Figure 4.5 shows the graphical presentation of NAAC accreditation and perceived service quality. The NAAC accreditation impact was tried to be examined on perceived

service quality variables in accredited and non-accredited higher education institutions. For this Linear Regression Analysis was performed through SPSS 26, and the results are shown in **Tables 4.8 to 4.14**, where the correlation value is **+0.946,** which is a very high degree of positive correlation. Standard Deviation was also executed to identify the consistency of ranking data, and it was found that perceived service quality **ranks 2 and 5** are the strongest categories.



Note: Data collected from the primary source

Figure 4.5

NAAC accreditation and perceived service quality

Table 4.7

Descriptive Statistics

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
NAAC_ACCREDITATION	29.0000	36.97522	13
PERCEIVED_SERVICE_QUALITY_RANK_1	54.7692	7.39542	13
PERCEIVED_SERVICE_QUALITY_RANK_2	39.2308	5.08517	13
PERCEIVED_SERVICE_QUALITY_RANK_3	47.0000	5.91608	13
PERCEIVED_SERVICE_QUALITY_RANK_4	44.1538	6.95037	13
PERCEIVED_SERVICE_QUALITY_RANK_5	46.3077	5.55855	13

PERCEIVED_SERVICE_QUALITY_RANK_6	48.3846	7.78394	13
PERCEIVED_SERVICE_QUALITY_RANK_7	97.1538	9.21815	13

Note: SPSS 26

Table 4.8
Correlations

		NAAC_ACCREDITATION	PERCEIVED_SERVICE_QUALITY_RANK_1	PERCEIVED_SERVICE_QUALITY_RANK_2	PERCEIVED_SERVICE_QUALITY_RANK_3	PERCEIVED_SERVICE_QUALITY_RANK_4	PERCEIVED_SERVICE_QUALITY_RANK_5	PERCEIVED_SERVICE_QUALITY_RANK_6	PERCEIVED_SERVICE_QUALITY_RANK_7
	NAAC_ACCREDITATION	1.000	-.356	-.326	.050	-.318	-.100	-.125	.839
	PERCEIVED_SERVICE_QUALITY_RANK_1	-.356	1.000	.150	.221	-.293	-.130	-.163	-.590
	PERCEIVED_SERVICE_QUALITY_RANK_2	-.326	.150	1.000	-.449	.157	.047	-.472	-.132
	PERCEIVED_SERVICE_QUALITY_RANK_3	.050	.221	-.449	1.000	-.347	.253	-.199	-.295
	PERCEIVED_SERVICE_QUALITY_RANK_4	-.318	-.293	.157	-.347	1.000	-.012	-.166	-.236
	PERCEIVED_SERVICE_QUALITY_RANK_5	-.100	-.130	.047	.253	-.012	1.000	-.483	-.271
	PERCEIVED_SE	-.125	-.163	-.472	-.199	-.166	-.483	1.000	.091

	RVICE_ QUALIT Y_RAN K_6								
	PERCEI VED_SE RVICE_ QUALIT Y_RAN K_7	.839	-.590	-.132	-.295	-.236	-.271	.091	1.000
	NAAC_ ACCRE DITATIO N	.	.116	.139	.436	.145	.372	.343	.000
	PERCEI VED_SE RVICE_ QUALIT Y_RAN K_1	.116	.	.312	.234	.166	.336	.297	.017
	PERCEI VED_SE RVICE_ QUALIT Y_RAN K_2	.139	.312	.	.062	.304	.439	.052	.333
	PERCEI VED_SE RVICE_ QUALIT Y_RAN K_3	.436	.234	.062	.	.123	.202	.257	.164
	PERCEI VED_SE RVICE_ QUALIT Y_RAN K_4	.145	.166	.304	.123	.	.484	.294	.219
	PERCEI VED_SE RVICE_ QUALIT Y_RAN K_5	.372	.336	.439	.202	.484	.	.047	.185
	PERCEI VED_SE RVICE_ QUALIT Y_RAN K_6	.343	.297	.052	.257	.294	.047	.	.384
	PERCEI VED_SE	.000	.017	.333	.164	.219	.185	.384	.

	RVICE_QUALITY_RANK_7								
	NAAC_ACCREDITATION	13	13	13	13	13	13	13	13
	PERCEIVED_SERVICE_QUALITY_RANK_1	13	13	13	13	13	13	13	13
	PERCEIVED_SERVICE_QUALITY_RANK_2	13	13	13	13	13	13	13	13
	PERCEIVED_SERVICE_QUALITY_RANK_3	13	13	13	13	13	13	13	13
	PERCEIVED_SERVICE_QUALITY_RANK_4	13	13	13	13	13	13	13	13
	PERCEIVED_SERVICE_QUALITY_RANK_5	13	13	13	13	13	13	13	13
	PERCEIVED_SERVICE_QUALITY_RANK_6	13	13	13	13	13	13	13	13
	PERCEIVED_SERVICE_QUALITY_RANK_7	13	13	13	13	13	13	13	13

Note: SPSS 26

Table 4.9
Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics					Durbin-Watson
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change	
1	.946[a]	.894	.789	17.00218	.894	8.459	6	6	.010	1.962

a. Predictors: (Constant), PERCEIVED_SERVICE_QUALITY_RANK_7, PERCEIVED_SERVICE_QUALITY_RANK_6, PERCEIVED_SERVICE_QUALITY_RANK_4, PERCEIVED_SERVICE_QUALITY_RANK_2, PERCEIVED_SERVICE_QUALITY_RANK_5, PERCEIVED_SERVICE_QUALITY_RANK_3

b. Dependent Variable: NAAC_ACCREDITATION

Note: SPSS 26

Table 4.10
ANOVA

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	14671.556	6	2445.259	8.459	.010[b]
	Residual	1734.444	6	289.074		
	Total	16406.000	12			

a. Dependent Variable: NAAC_ACCREDITATION

b. Predictors: (Constant), PERCEIVED_SERVICE_QUALITY_RANK_7, PERCEIVED_SERVICE_QUALITY_RANK_6, PERCEIVED_SERVICE_QUALITY_RANK_4, PERCEIVED_SERVICE_QUALITY_RANK_2, PERCEIVED_SERVICE_QUALITY_RANK_5, PERCEIVED_SERVICE_QUALITY_RANK_3

Note: SPSS 26

Table 4.11
Coefficients

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	95.0% Confidence Interval for B		Correlations			Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Zero-order	Partial	Part	Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	132.385	295.120		.449	.669	-589.748	854.518					
	PERCEIVED_SERVICE_QUALITY_RA	-3.610	1.792	-.496	-2.014	.091	-7.996	.775	-.326	-.635	-.267	.290	3.448

	NK_2												
	PERCEIVED_SERVICE_QUALITY_RANK_3	-.688	1.587	-.110	-.433	.680	-4.571	3.196	.050	-.174	-.058	.273	3.659
	PERCEIVED_SERVICE_QUALITY_RANK_4	-1.070	.969	-.201	-1.104	.312	-3.440	1.300	-.318	-.411	-.147	.532	1.881
	PERCEIVED_SERVICE_QUALITY_RANK_5	-.778	1.136	-.117	-.684	.519	-3.558	2.003	-.100	-.269	-.091	.604	1.656
	PERCEIVED_SERVICE_QUALITY_RANK_6	-2.541	1.175	-.535	-2.162	.074	-5.418	.335	-.125	-.662	-.287	.288	3.475
	PERCEIVED_SERVICE_QUALITY_RANK_7	2.849	.764	.710	3.726	.010	.978	4.719	.839	.836	.495	.485	2.061
a. Dependent Variable: NAAC_ACCREDITATION													

Note: SPSS 26

Table 4.12
Coefficient Correlations

Model			PERCEIVED_SERVICE_QUALITY_RANK_7	PERCEIVED_SERVICE_QUALITY_RANK_6	PERCEIVED_SERVICE_QUALITY_RANK_4	PERCEIVED_SERVICE_QUALITY_RANK_2	PERCEIVED_SERVICE_QUALITY_RANK_5	PERCEIVED_SERVICE_QUALITY_RANK_3
1	Correlations	PERCEIVED_SERVICE_QUALITY_RANK_7	1.000	.537	.563	.578	.401	.649
		PERCEIVED_SERVICE_QUALITY_RANK_6	.537	1.000	.532	.764	.559	.683
		PERCEIVED_SERVICE_QUALITY_RANK_4	.563	.532	1.000	.479	.283	.637
		PERCEIVED_SERVICE_QUALITY_RANK_2	.578	.764	.479	1.000	.357	.770
		PERCEIVED_SERVI	.401	.559	.283	.357	1.000	.252

		CE_QUALITY_RANK_5						
		PERCEIVED_SERVICE_QUALITY_RANK_3	.649	.683	.637	.770	.252	1.000
	Covariances	PERCEIVED_SERVICE_QUALITY_RANK_7	.584	.482	.417	.792	.348	.787
		PERCEIVED_SERVICE_QUALITY_RANK_6	.482	1.382	.606	1.610	.746	1.273
		PERCEIVED_SERVICE_QUALITY_RANK_4	.417	.606	.938	.831	.311	.979
		PERCEIVED_SERVICE_QUALITY_RANK_2	.792	1.610	.831	3.212	.726	2.190
		PERCEIVED_SERVICE_QUALITY_RANK_5	.348	.746	.311	.726	1.291	.455
		PERCEIVED_SERVICE_QUALITY_RANK_3	.787	1.273	.979	2.190	.455	2.519
a. Dependent Variable: NAAC_ACCREDITATION								

Note: SPSS 26

Table 4.13
Collinearity Diagnostics

Model	Dimension	Eigenvalue	Condition Index	Variance Proportions						
				(Constant)	PERCEIVED_SERVICE_QUALITY_RANK_2	PERCEIVED_SERVICE_QUALITY_RANK_3	PERCEIVED_SERVICE_QUALITY_RANK_4	PERCEIVED_SERVICE_QUALITY_RANK_5	PERCEIVED_SERVICE_QUALITY_RANK_6	PERCEIVED_SERVICE_QUALITY_RANK_7
1	1	6.906	1.000	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00
	2	.034	14.227	.00	.02	.00	.04	.02	.12	.00
	3	.027	15.974	.00	.01	.06	.14	.05	.02	.00
	4	.017	20.352	.00	.10	.02	.27	.00	.00	.03
	5	.009	28.369	.00	.08	.00	.03	.04	.12	.29
	6	.008	29.752	.00	.05	.16	.01	.57	.01	.01
	7	.000	178.899	1.00	.74	.76	.51	.32	.73	.66
a. Dependent Variable: NAAC_ACCREDITATION										

Note: SPSS 26

Table 4.14
Residuals Statistics

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Predicted Value	-10.7017	119.6292	29.0000	34.96612	13
Residual	-15.15928	23.37078	.00000	12.02236	13
Std. Predicted Value	-1.135	2.592	.000	1.000	13
Std. Residual	-.892	1.375	.000	.707	13
a. Dependent Variable: NAAC_ACCREDITATION					

Note: SPSS 26

4.3 Research Question Three

Does NAAC accreditation impact consumer confidence in higher education institutions?

Table 4.15
NAAC Accreditation and Consumer Confidence

NAAC accreditation		Consumer Confidence	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
A++	143	Experiential Learning Opportunities	53	38	42	40	53	44	107
A+	39	Industry Connections and Collaborations	44	45	38	40	54	54	102
A	24	Technological Integration	41	49	36	37	58	58	98
B++	14	Global Exposure and Recognition	37	39	58	52	47	58	86
B+	8	Cultural Inclusivity	48	28	61	33	63	78	66
B	5	Reputation of Faculty Members	61	42	35	48	53	71	67
C	5	Academic Freedom	40	35	55	44	42	68	93
None of the above	4	Peer Influence	53	35	55	39	62	81	52
All of the above	13	Brand Image and Marketing	37	51	53	47	68	51	70
Only A++	10	Flexibility and Customization of Programs	38	46	49	31	63	67	83

Only A+ and A++	39	Environmental Sustainability	38	35	54	36	55	65	94
Only A, A+, and A++	34	Customer Service and Administrative Support	38	44	48	34	56	65	92
Not sure	39	Innovation and Research Opportunities	43	44	50	51	49	39	101

Note: Data collected from the primary source

Table 4.15 presents the responses of stakeholders regarding various consumer confidence variables in accredited and non-accredited higher education institutions. The **figure** shows the graphical representation of the ranks for various consumer confidence variables.

For testing the research **question 4.3,** Linear Regression analysis was performed through SPSS 26, and it was found that there is a very high degree of positive correlation between NAAC accreditation and consumer confidence in higher education institutions. That means NAAC accreditation influences the consumers' confidence (stakeholders) in Higher Education Institutions. As per descriptive analysis, the Rank 2 & Rank 4 are the most consistent ranks for consumer confidence. The correlation value is +0.913, which very significant positive correlation and significant at significance level below 0.05.

Table 4.16
Descriptive Statistics

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
NAAC_ACCREDITATION	29.0000	36.97522	13
CONSUMER_CONFIDENCE_RANK_1	43.9231	7.63175	13
CONSUMER_CONFIDENCE_RANK_2	40.8462	6.54276	13
CONSUMER_CONFIDENCE_RANK_3	48.7692	8.53575	13
CONSUMER_CONFIDENCE_RANK_4	40.9231	6.92172	13
CONSUMER_CONFIDENCE_RANK_5	55.6154	7.24038	13
CONSUMER_CONFIDENCE_RANK_6	61.4615	12.39365	13
CONSUMER_CONFIDENCE_RANK_7	85.4615	16.81574	13

Note: SPSS 26

Table 4.17
Correlations

		NAAC_ACCREDITATION	CONSUMER_CONFIDENCE_RANK_1	CONSUMER_CONFIDENCE_RANK_2	CONSUMER_CONFIDENCE_RANK_3	CONSUMER_CONFIDENCE_RANK_4	CONSUMER_CONFIDENCE_RANK_5	CONSUMER_CONFIDENCE_RANK_6	CONSUMER_CONFIDENCE_RANK_7
Pearson Correlation	NAAC_ACCREDITATION	1.000	.192	-.013	-.316	-.059	-.165	-.605	.620
	CONSUMER_CONFIDENCE_RANK_1	.192	1.000	-.312	-.384	.099	.005	.243	-.359
	CONSUMER_CONFIDENCE_RANK_2	-.013	-.312	1.000	-.563	.182	.226	-.529	.257
	CONSUMER_CONFIDENCE_RANK_3	-.316	-.384	-.563	1.000	-.005	.066	.307	-.367
	CONSUMER_CONFIDENCE_RANK_4	-.059	.099	.182	-.005	1.000	-.493	-.456	.023
	CONSUMER_CONFIDENCE_RANK_5	-.165	.005	.226	.066	-.493	1.000	.252	-.537
	CONSUMER_CONFIDENCE_RANK_6	-.605	.243	-.529	.307	-.456	.252	1.000	-.718
	CONSUMER_CONFIDENCE_RANK_7	.620	-.359	.257	-.367	.023	-.537	-.718	1.000
Sig. (1-tailed)	NAAC_ACCREDITATION	.	.265	.483	.146	.424	.295	.014	.012
	CONSUMER_CONFIDENCE_RANK_1	.265	.	.149	.098	.373	.493	.212	.114
	CONSUMER_CONF	.483	.149	.	.023	.276	.229	.031	.199

	IDENCE_ RANK_2								
	CONSUM ER_CONF IDENCE_ RANK_3	.146	.098	.023	.	.494	.415	.154	.109
	CONSUM ER_CONF IDENCE_ RANK_4	.424	.373	.276	.494	.	.044	.059	.470
	CONSUM ER_CONF IDENCE_ RANK_5	.295	.493	.229	.415	.044	.	.203	.029
	CONSUM ER_CONF IDENCE_ RANK_6	.014	.212	.031	.154	.059	.203	.	.003
	CONSUM ER_CONF IDENCE_ RANK_7	.012	.114	.199	.109	.470	.029	.003	.
N	NAAC_AC CREDITAT ION	13	13	13	13	13	13	13	13
	CONSUM ER_CONF IDENCE_ RANK_1	13	13	13	13	13	13	13	13
	CONSUM ER_CONF IDENCE_ RANK_2	13	13	13	13	13	13	13	13
	CONSUM ER_CONF IDENCE_ RANK_3	13	13	13	13	13	13	13	13
	CONSUM ER_CONF IDENCE_ RANK_4	13	13	13	13	13	13	13	13
	CONSUM ER_CONF IDENCE_ RANK_5	13	13	13	13	13	13	13	13
	CONSUM ER_CONF IDENCE_ RANK_6	13	13	13	13	13	13	13	13
	CONSUM ER_CONF IDENCE_	13	13	13	13	13	13	13	13

	RANK_7								

Note: SPSS 26

Table 4.18
Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics					Durbin-Watson
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change	
1	.913[a]	.833	.666	21.36680	.833	4.989	6	6	.036	2.120

a. Predictors: (Constant), CONSUMER_CONFIDENCE_RANK_7, CONSUMER_CONFIDENCE_RANK_4, CONSUMER_CONFIDENCE_RANK_2, CONSUMER_CONFIDENCE_RANK_1, CONSUMER_CONFIDENCE_RANK_5, CONSUMER_CONFIDENCE_RANK_3

b. Dependent Variable: NAAC_ACCREDITATION

Note: SPSS 26

Table 4.19
ANOVA

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	13666.759	6	2277.793	4.989	.036[b]
	Residual	2739.241	6	456.540		
	Total	16406.000	12			

a. Dependent Variable: NAAC_ACCREDITATION

b. Predictors: (Constant), CONSUMER_CONFIDENCE_RANK_7, CONSUMER_CONFIDENCE_RANK_4, CONSUMER_CONFIDENCE_RANK_2, CONSUMER_CONFIDENCE_RANK_1, CONSUMER_CONFIDENCE_RANK_5, CONSUMER_CONFIDENCE_RANK_3

Note: SPSS 26

Table 4.20
Coefficients

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	95.0% Confidence Interval for B		Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	-897.976	315.701		-2.844	.029	-1670.468	-125.484		
	CONSUMER_CONFIDENCE_RANK_1	5.450	2.534	1.125	2.151	.075	-.749	11.650	.102	9.827
	CONSU	1.383	3.418	.245	.405	.700	-6.981	9.746	.076	13.144

	MER_CONFIDENCE_RANK_2									
	CONSUMER_CONFIDENCE_RANK_3	3.412	2.653	.788	1.286	.246	-3.080	9.904	.074	13.481
	CONSUMER_CONFIDENCE_RANK_4	.193	1.919	.036	.101	.923	-4.502	4.889	.216	4.637
	CONSUMER_CONFIDENCE_RANK_5	2.945	2.000	.577	1.473	.191	-1.949	7.839	.181	5.512
	CONSUMER_CONFIDENCE_RANK_7	3.428	.701	1.559	4.887	.003	1.712	5.145	.273	3.657
a. Dependent Variable: NAAC_ACCREDITATION										

Note: SPSS 26

Table 4.21
Collinearity Diagnostics

Model	Dimension	Eigenvalue	Condition Index	Variance Proportions						
				(Constant)	CONSUMER_CONFIDENCE_RANK_1	CONSUMER_CONFIDENCE_RANK_2	CONSUMER_CONFIDENCE_RANK_3	CONSUMER_CONFIDENCE_RANK_4	CONSUMER_CONFIDENCE_RANK_5	CONSUMER_CONFIDENCE_RANK_7
1	1	6.852	1.000	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00
	2	.053	11.372	.00	.00	.00	.01	.00	.00	.08
	3	.038	13.368	.00	.04	.00	.02	.00	.00	.01
	4	.032	14.660	.00	.00	.01	.00	.06	.03	.00
	5	.023	17.316	.00	.02	.02	.00	.09	.00	.11
	6	.001	73.173	.04	.05	.27	.08	.57	.87	.34
	7	.000	165.585	.96	.89	.70	.89	.28	.09	.45
a. Dependent Variable: NAAC_ACCREDITATION										

Note: SPSS 26

4.4 Research Question Four

Are there significant variations in service quality variables of accredited and non-accredited higher education institutions?

Table 4.22
Perceived Service Quality Variables of Higher Education Institutions-

	N	Range	Minimum	Maximum	Mean		Std. Deviation	Variance	Skewness		Kurtosis	
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error
Security and Safety	7	36.00	15.00	51.00	23.5714	4.68461	12.39432	153.619	2.380	.794	5.976	1.587
Career Prospects and Placement Assistance	7	29.00	18.00	47.00	23.7143	3.92619	10.38772	107.905	2.519	.794	6.494	1.587
Faculty Availability	7	33.00	15.00	48.00	23.5714	4.41241	11.67415	136.286	1.970	.794	3.804	1.587
Learning Materials	7	25.00	16.00	41.00	23.7143	3.30738	8.75051	76.571	1.545	.794	2.252	1.587
Extra-Curricular Engagement and Cultural and Emotional Support	7	21.00	16.00	37.00	23.7143	2.46610	6.52468	42.571	1.548	.794	3.565	1.587
Cleanliness and Maintenance	7	22.00	17.00	39.00	24.0000	2.89499	7.65942	58.667	1.449	.794	2.046	1.587
Mentorship Programs	7	25.00	15.00	40.00	23.8571	3.11241	8.23465	67.810	1.263	.794	2.505	1.587
Student Support Services and Resolution of Problems	7	21.00	19.00	40.00	23.5714	2.86071	7.56873	57.286	2.222	.794	5.153	1.587
Campus Infrastructure and Technolog	7	22.00	18.00	40.00	23.5714	3.07724	8.14160	66.286	1.789	.794	2.659	1.587

y and Facilities												
Accreditation and Recognition	7	23.00	17.00	40.00	23.7143	2.83443	7.49921	56.238	2.177	.794	5.318	1.587
Consistency in Teaching	7	29.00	15.00	44.00	23.7143	3.80923	10.07827	101.571	1.563	.794	2.833	1.587
Course Availability and Accuracy: Adherence to Promises	7	29.00	14.00	43.00	23.5714	3.46999	9.18073	84.286	1.903	.794	4.551	1.587
Timely Academic Services	7	28.00	17.00	45.00	23.7143	3.64962	9.65599	93.238	2.343	.794	5.814	1.587
Valid N (listwise)	7											

Note: SPSS 26

Table 4.22 shows the standard deviation result for various perceived service quality variables of all Higher Education Institutions and it was found that Extra-Curricular Engagement and Cultural and Emotional Support (**6.52468)**, Accreditation and Recognition (**7.49921**), Student Support Services and Resolution of Problems (**7.56873)**, Cleanliness and Maintenance (**7.65942**) and Campus Infrastructure and Technology and Facilities (**8.14160)** are most significant predictors for perceived service quality.

Table 4.23
Perceived Service Quality Variables of Accredited Higher Education Institutions

	N	Range	Minimum	Maximum	Mean		Std. Deviation	Variance	Skewness		Kurtosis	
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error
Security and Safety	7	46.00	20.00	66.00	30.2857	6.08164	16.09052	258.905	2.412	.794	6.094	1.587
Career Prospects and Placement Assistance	7	37.00	22.00	59.00	30.1429	4.86694	12.87670	165.810	2.515	.794	6.488	1.587

Faculty Availability	7	40.00	20.00	60.00	30.2857	5.38390	14.24446	202.905	1.944	.794	3.710	1.587
Learning Materials	7	32.00	20.00	52.00	30.1429	4.15434	10.99134	120.810	1.549	.794	2.460	1.587
Extra-Curricular Engagement and Cultural and Emotional Support	7	28.00	20.00	48.00	30.1429	3.27638	8.66850	75.143	1.629	.794	3.911	1.587
Cleanliness and Maintenance	7	28.00	21.00	49.00	29.8571	3.69316	9.77119	95.476	1.451	.794	2.060	1.587
Mentorship Programs	7	32.00	18.00	50.00	30.0000	3.88526	10.27943	105.667	1.191	.794	2.430	1.587
Student Support Services and Resolution of Problems	7	27.00	24.00	51.00	30.2857	3.61027	9.55186	91.238	2.214	.794	5.116	1.587
Campus Infrastructure and Technology and Facilities	7	30.00	22.00	52.00	30.2857	4.12146	10.90435	118.905	1.711	.794	2.325	1.587
Accreditation and Recognition	7	30.00	22.00	52.00	30.1429	3.78234	10.00714	100.143	2.252	.794	5.471	1.587
Consistency in Teaching	7	39.00	18.00	57.00	30.1429	4.97340	13.15838	173.143	1.659	.794	3.244	1.587

Course Availability and Accuracy: Adherence to Promises	7	37.00	18.00	55.00	30.2857	4.40083	11.64351	135.571	1.922	.794	4.680	1.587
Timely Academic Services	7	36.00	21.00	57.00	30.1429	4.61586	12.21241	149.143	2.319	.794	5.724	1.587
Valid N (listwise)	7											

Note: SPSS 26

Table 4.23 shows the standard deviation result for various perceived service quality variables of Accredited Higher Education Institutions and it was discovered that Extra-Curricular Engagement and Cultural and Emotional Support (**8.66850),** Student Support Services and Resolution of Problems (**9.55186),** Cleanliness and Maintenance (**9.77119),** Accreditation and Recognition (**10.00714)**, and Mentorship Programs (**10.27943)** are most significant predictors for perceived service quality.

Table 4.24
Perceived Service Quality Variables of Non-Accredited Higher Education Institutions

	N	Range	Minimum	Maximum	Mean		Std. Deviation	Variance	Skewness		Kurtosis	
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error
Security and Safety	7	36.00	15.00	51.00	23.5714	4.68461	12.39432	153.619	2.380	.794	5.976	1.587
Career Prospects and Placement Assistance	7	29.00	18.00	47.00	23.7143	3.92619	10.38772	107.905	2.519	.794	6.494	1.587
Faculty Availability	7	33.00	15.00	48.00	23.5714	4.41241	11.67415	136.286	1.970	.794	3.804	1.587
Learning Materials	7	25.00	16.00	41.00	23.7143	3.30738	8.75051	76.571	1.545	.794	2.252	1.587
Extra-Curricular Engageme	7	21.00	16.00	37.00	23.7143	2.46610	6.52468	42.571	1.548	.794	3.565	1.587

nt and Cultural and Emotional Support												
Cleanliness and Maintenance	7	22.00	17.00	39.00	24.000	2.89499	7.65942	58.667	1.449	.794	2.046	1.587
Mentorship Programs	7	25.00	15.00	40.00	23.8571	3.11241	8.23465	67.810	1.263	.794	2.505	1.587
Student Support Services and Resolution of Problems	7	21.00	19.00	40.00	23.5714	2.86071	7.56873	57.286	2.222	.794	5.153	1.587
Campus Infrastructure and Technology and Facilities	7	22.00	18.00	40.00	23.5714	3.07724	8.14160	66.286	1.789	.794	2.659	1.587
Accreditation and Recognition	7	23.00	17.00	40.00	23.7143	2.83443	7.49921	56.238	2.177	.794	5.318	1.587
Consistency in Teaching	7	29.00	15.00	44.00	23.7143	3.80923	10.07827	101.571	1.563	.794	2.833	1.587
Course Availability and Accuracy: Adherence to Promises	7	29.00	14.00	43.00	23.5714	3.46999	9.18073	84.286	1.903	.794	4.551	1.587
Timely Academic Services	7	28.00	17.00	45.00	23.7143	3.64962	9.65599	93.238	2.343	.794	5.814	1.587
Valid N (listwise)	7											

Note: SPSS 26

Table 4.24 shows the standard deviation result for various perceived service quality variables of **Non-Accredited Higher Education Institutions** and it was discovered that Extra-Curricular Engagement and Cultural and Emotional Support (**6.52468),** Accreditation and Recognition(**7.49921),** Student Support Services and Resolution of Problems (**7.56873),**

Cleanliness and Maintenance (**7.65942) and** Campus Infrastructure and Technology and Facilities **(8.14160)** are most significant predictors for perceived service quality.

Table 4.25
Significant Predictors of Perceived Service Quality Variables for Higher Education Institutions

Most Significant Predictor	All Higher Education Institutions	Accredited Higher Education Institutions	Non-Accredited Higher Education Institutions
Significant Predictor 1	Extra-Curricular Engagement and Cultural and Emotional Support	Extra-Curricular Engagement and Cultural and Emotional Support	Extra-Curricular Engagement and Cultural and Emotional Support
Significant Predictor 2	Accreditation and Recognition	Student Support Services and Resolution of Problems	Accreditation and Recognition
Significant Predictor 3	Student Support Services and Resolution of Problems	Cleanliness and Maintenance	Student Support Services and Resolution of Problems
Significant Predictor 4	Cleanliness and Maintenance	Accreditation and Recognition	Cleanliness and Maintenance
Significant Predictor 5	Campus Infrastructure and Technology and Facilities	Mentorship Programs	Campus Infrastructure and Technology and Facilities

Note: SPSS 26

Table 4.25 indicates the various preferences of respondents for perceived service quality variables, and it is depicted from the table that there is a significant variation in perceived service quality between Accredited and Non-Accredited Higher Education Institutions.

4.5 Research Question Five

Are there significant variations in consumer confidence variables among higher education institutions?

Table 4.26
Consumer Confidence Variables of Higher Education Institutions

	N	Range	Minimum	Maximum	Mean		Std. Deviation	Variance	Skewness		Kurtosis	
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error
Reputation of Faculty Members	14	25.00	15.00	40.00	26.9286	1.96526	7.35333	54.071	.229	.597	-.595	1.154
Brand	14	54.00	16.00	70.00	38.7	4.795	17.94	321.91	.486	.597	-	1.154

Image and Marketing					143	18	191	2			1.034	
Global Exposure and Recognition	14	70.00	16.00	86.00	38.8571	5.29343	19.80620	392.286	.985	.597	.901	1.154
Innovation and Research Opportunities	14	84.00	17.00	101.00	38.7143	5.94150	22.23105	494.220	1.689	.597	4.106	1.154
Cultural Inclusivity	14	66.00	12.00	78.00	38.7857	5.53031	20.69254	428.181	.635	.597	-.837	1.154
Industry Connections and Collaborations	14	85.00	17.00	102.00	38.8571	6.04639	22.62353	511.824	1.695	.597	4.008	1.154
Academic Freedom	14	78.00	15.00	93.00	38.7143	5.85111	21.89285	479.297	1.257	.597	1.688	1.154
Technological Integration	14	82.00	16.00	98.00	38.8571	5.95852	22.29473	497.055	1.458	.597	2.789	1.154
Environmental Sustainability	14	79.00	15.00	94.00	38.7857	5.90695	22.10179	488.489	1.255	.597	1.702	1.154
Flexibility and Customization of Programs	14	69.00	14.00	83.00	38.8571	5.49411	20.55708	422.593	.865	.597	.011	1.154
Peer Influence	14	66.00	15.00	81.00	38.7143	5.17754	19.37258	375.297	.761	.597	-.052	1.154
Customer Service	14	77.00	15.00	92.00	38.7857	5.73516	21.45901	460.489	1.216	.597	1.602	1.154

and Administrative Support												
Experiential Learning Opportunities	14	90.00	17.00	107.00	38.7143	6.37339	23.84704	568.681	1.863	.597	4.747	1.154
Valid N (listwise)	14											

Note: SPSS 26

Table 4.26 indicates the responses of various Consumer Confidence Variables for Higher Education Institutions through the standard deviation test. It was discovered that Reputation of Faculty Members (**7.35333),** Brand Image and Marketing (**17.94191),** Peer Influence (**19.37258),** Global Exposure and Recognition (**19.80620),** Flexibility and Customization of Programs (**20.55708)** are significant predictors of consumer (stakeholders) confidence for Higher Education Institutions.

Table 4.27
Consumer Confidence Variables of Accredited Higher Education Institutions

	N	Range	Minimum	Maximum	Mean		Std. Deviation	Variance	Skewness		Kurtosis	
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error
Reputation of Faculty Members	7	20.00	20.00	40.00	30.4286	2.77624	7.34523	53.952	-.049	.794	-1.309	1.587
Brand Image and Marketing	7	33.00	37.00	70.00	53.8571	4.38845	11.61075	134.810	.280	.794	-.495	1.587
Global Exposure and Recognition	7	49.00	37.00	86.00	53.8571	6.21606	16.44616	270.476	1.309	.794	2.253	1.587
Innovation and Research Opportunities	7	62.00	39.00	101.00	53.8571	8.02505	21.23228	450.810	2.415	.794	6.109	1.587
Cultural	7	50.00	28.00	78.00	53.8	6.90	18.270	333.	-	.794	-	1.587

Inclusivity					571	558	45	810	.366		1.176	
Industry Connections and Collaborations	7	64.00	38.00	102.00	53.8571	8.36213	22.12411	489.476	2.225	.794	5.289	1.587
Academic Freedom	7	58.00	35.00	93.00	53.8571	7.74421	20.48925	419.810	1.378	.794	1.432	1.587
Technological Integration	7	62.00	36.00	98.00	53.8571	8.12822	21.50526	462.476	1.723	.794	3.345	1.587
Environmental Sustainability	7	59.00	35.00	94.00	53.8571	7.96250	21.06679	443.810	1.240	.794	1.479	1.587
Flexibility and Customization of Programs	7	52.00	31.00	83.00	53.8571	6.83976	18.09630	327.476	.443	.794	-.619	1.587
Peer Influence	7	46.00	35.00	81.00	53.8571	5.74219	15.19242	230.810	.702	.794	.928	1.587
Customer Service and Administrative Support	7	58.00	34.00	92.00	53.8571	7.49739	19.83623	393.476	1.313	.794	1.718	1.587
Experiential Learning Opportunities	7	69.00	38.00	107.00	53.8571	9.13765	24.17594	584.476	2.325	.794	5.672	1.587
Valid N (listwise)	7											

Note: SPSS 26

Table 4.27 presents the responses of various Consumer Confidence Variables for Accredited Higher Education Institutions through the standard deviation test. It was discovered that Reputation of Faculty Members (**7.34523),** Brand Image and Marketing (**11.61075),** Peer Influence (**15.19242),** Global Exposure and Recognition **(16.44616), and** Flexibility and Customization of Programs (**18.09630)** are significant predictors of consumer (stakeholders) confidence for accredited Higher Education Institutions.

Table 4.28
Consumer Confidence Variables of Non-Accredited Higher Education Institutions

	N	Range	Minimum	Maximum	Mean		Std. Deviation	Variance	Skewness		Kurtosis	
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error
Reputation of Faculty Members	7	16.00	15.00	31.00	23.4286	2.22387	5.88380	34.619	-.138	.794	-1.365	1.587
Brand Image and Marketing	7	15.00	16.00	31.00	23.5714	1.98635	5.25538	27.619	.348	.794	-.447	1.587
Global Exposure and Recognition	7	22.00	16.00	38.00	23.8571	2.78968	7.38080	54.476	1.171	.794	1.855	1.587
Innovation and Research Opportunities	7	27.00	17.00	44.00	23.5714	3.48368	9.21696	84.952	2.396	.794	6.040	1.587
Cultural Inclusivity	7	22.00	12.00	34.00	23.7143	3.02147	7.99405	63.905	-.429	.794	-1.163	1.587
Industry Connections and Collaborations	7	28.00	17.00	45.00	23.8571	3.67377	9.71989	94.476	2.225	.794	5.265	1.587
Academic Freedom	7	26.00	15.00	41.00	23.5714	3.45624	9.14435	83.619	1.370	.794	1.390	1.587
Technological Integration	7	27.00	16.00	43.00	23.8571	3.57524	9.45919	89.476	1.615	.794	2.943	1.587
Environmental Sustainability	7	26.00	15.00	41.00	23.7143	3.47586	9.19627	84.571	1.167	.794	1.216	1.587
Flexibility and Customi	7	23.00	14.00	37.00	23.8571	3.00340	7.94625	63.143	.527	.794	-.400	1.587

zation of Programs												
Peer Influence	7	21.00	15.00	36.00	23.5714	2.59906	6.87646	47.286	.751	.794	1.125	1.587
Customer Service and Administrative Support	7	25.00	15.00	40.00	23.7143	3.25660	8.61615	74.238	1.233	.794	1.329	1.587
Experiential Learning Opportunities	7	30.00	17.00	47.00	23.5714	4.01104	10.61221	112.619	2.369	.794	5.841	1.587
Valid N (listwise)	7											

Note: SPSS 26

Table 4.28 presents the responses of various Consumer Confidence Variables for Non-Accredited Higher Education Institutions through the standard deviation test. It was discovered that Brand Image and Marketing (**5.25538),** Reputation of Faculty Members **(5.88380),** Peer Influence (**6.87646),** Global Exposure and Recognition **(7.38080), and** Flexibility and Customization of Programs (**7.94625)** are significant predictors of consumer (stakeholders) confidence for non-accredited Higher Education Institutions.

Table 4.29
Significant Predictors of Consumer Confidence Variables for Higher Education Institutions

Most Significant Predictor	All Higher Education Institutions	Accredited Higher Education Institutions	Non-Accredited Higher Education Institutions
Significant Predictor 1	Reputation of Faculty Members	Reputation of Faculty Members	Brand Image and Marketing
Significant Predictor 2	Brand Image and Marketing	Brand Image and Marketing	Reputation of Faculty Members
Significant Predictor 3	Peer Influence	Peer Influence	Peer Influence
Significant Predictor 4	Global Exposure and Recognition	Global Exposure and Recognition	Global Exposure and Recognition
Significant Predictor 5	Flexibility and Customization of	Flexibility and Customization of	Flexibility and Customization of

	Programs	Programs	Programs

Note: SPSS 26

Table 4.29 indicates the various preferences of respondents for consumer confidence variables, and it is depicted from the table that there is a significant difference between Accredited and Non-Accredited Higher Education Institutions.

4.6 Research Question Six

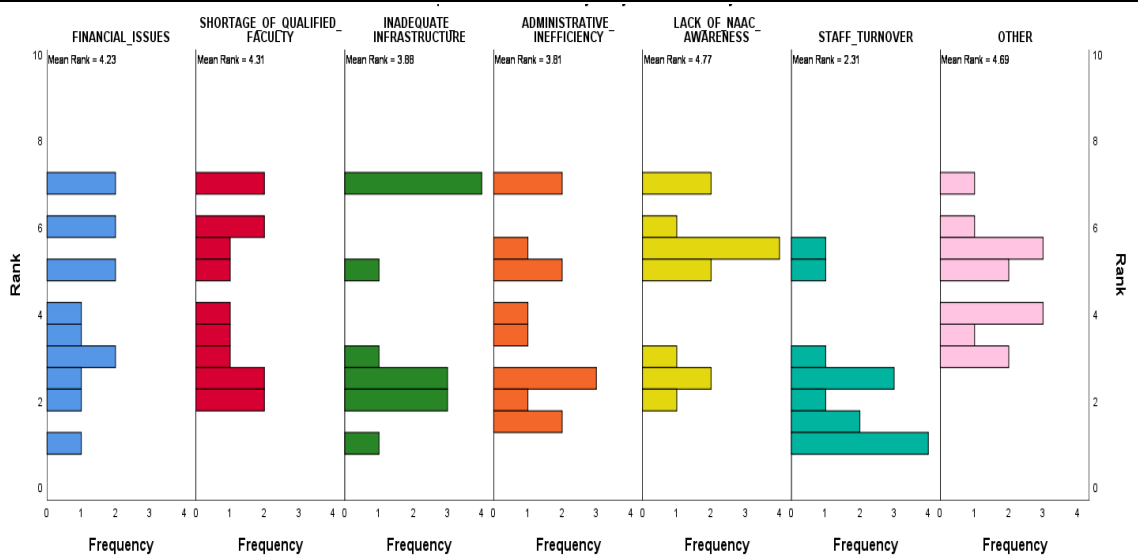
Do the challenges faced by accredited and non-accredited higher education institutions differ in achieving or maintaining NAAC accreditation?

Table 4.30
Hypothesis Test Summary

No.	Null Hypothesis	Test	Sig.	Decision
1	The distributions of FINANCIAL_ISSUES, SHORTAGE_OF_QUALIFIED_FACULTY, INADEQUATE_INFRASTRUCTURE, ADMINISTRATIVE_INEFFICIENCY, LACK_OF_NAAC_AWARENESS, STAFF_TURNOVER and OTHER are the same.	Related-Samples Friedman's Two-Way Analysis of Variance by Ranks	.048	Reject the null hypothesis.
Asymptotic significances are displayed. The significance level is .050.				

Note: SPSS 26

Table 4.30 shows the Hypothesis Test Summary of **Related-Samples Friedman's Two-Way Analysis of Variance by Ranks** was performed to test the above hypothesis, and it was assumed that all accredited and non-accredited Higher Education Institutions are facing the same challenges in achieving or maintaining NAAC accreditation. And it was discovered by the result that there is significant variation.



Note: SPSS 26
Figure 4.6
Related-Samples Friedman's Two-Way Analysis of Variance by Ranks

Figure 4.6 presents the Related-Samples Friedman's Two-Way Analysis of Variance by Ranks for various challenges faced by accredited and non-accredited Higher Education Institutions, and challenges vary among accredited and non-accredited Higher Education Institutions.

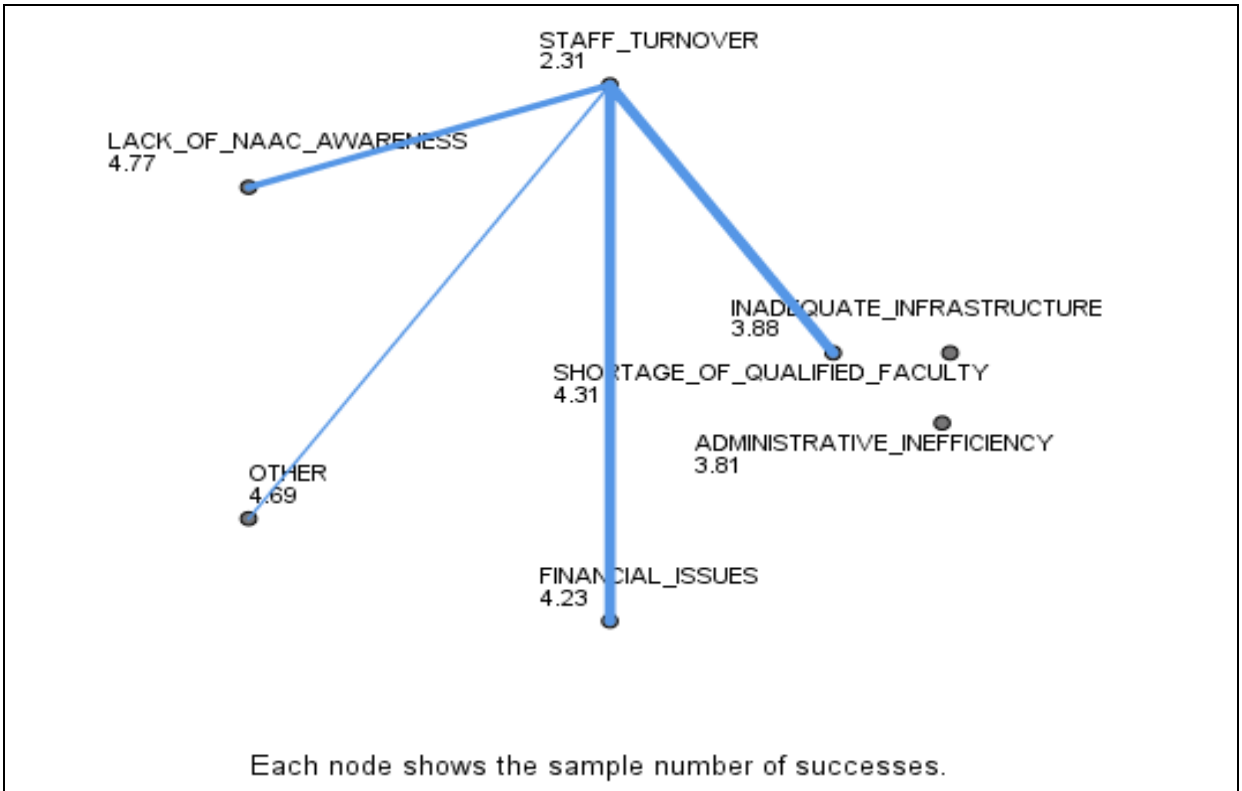
Table 4.31
Pairwise Comparisons

Sample 1-Sample 2	Test Statistic	Std. Error	Std. Test Statistic	Sig.	Adj. Sig.
STAFF_TURNOVER-ADMINISTRATIVE_INEFFICIENCY	1.500	.847	1.770	.077	1.000
STAFF_TURNOVER-INADEQUATE_INFRASTRUCTURE	1.577	.847	1.861	.063	1.000
STAFF_TURNOVER-FINANCIAL_ISSUES	1.923	.847	2.270	.023	.488
STAFF_TURNOVER-SHORTAGE_OF_QUALIFIED_FACULTY	2.000	.847	2.360	.018	.383
STAFF_TURNOVER-OTHER	-2.385	.847	-2.814	.005	.103
STAFF_TURNOVER-LACK_OF_NAAC_AWARENESS	2.462	.847	2.905	.004	.077
ADMINISTRATIVE_INEFFICIENCY-INADEQUATE_INFRASTRUCTURE	.077	.847	.091	.928	1.000
ADMINISTRATIVE_INEFFICIENCY-FINANCIAL_ISSUES	.423	.847	.499	.618	1.000
ADMINISTRATIVE_INEFFICIENCY-SHORTAGE_OF_QUALIFIED_FACULTY	.500	.847	.590	.555	1.000

ADMINISTRATIVE_INEFFICIENCY-OTHER	-.885	.847	-1.044	.296	1.000
ADMINISTRATIVE_INEFFICIENCY-LACK_OF_NAAC_AWARENESS	-.962	.847	-1.135	.256	1.000
INADEQUATE_INFRASTRUCTURE-FINANCIAL_ISSUES	.346	.847	.409	.683	1.000
INADEQUATE_INFRASTRUCTURE-SHORTAGE_OF_QUALIFIED_FACULTY	.423	.847	.499	.618	1.000
INADEQUATE_INFRASTRUCTURE-OTHER	-.808	.847	-.953	.340	1.000
INADEQUATE_INFRASTRUCTURE-LACK_OF_NAAC_AWARENESS	-.885	.847	-1.044	.296	1.000
FINANCIAL_ISSUES-SHORTAGE_OF_QUALIFIED_FACULTY	-.077	.847	-.091	.928	1.000
FINANCIAL_ISSUES-OTHER	-.462	.847	-.545	.586	1.000
FINANCIAL_ISSUES-LACK_OF_NAAC_AWARENESS	-.538	.847	-.635	.525	1.000
SHORTAGE_OF_QUALIFIED_FACULTY-OTHER	-.385	.847	-.454	.650	1.000
SHORTAGE_OF_QUALIFIED_FACULTY-LACK_OF_NAAC_AWARENESS	-.462	.847	-.545	.586	1.000
OTHER-LACK_OF_NAAC_AWARENESS	.077	.847	.091	.928	1.000
Each row tests the null hypothesis that the Sample 1 and Sample 2 distributions are the same. Asymptotic significances (2-sided tests) are displayed. The significance level is .05.					
a. Significance values have been adjusted by the Bonferroni correction for multiple tests.					

Note: SPSS 26

Table 4.31 displays the pairwise comparison of challenges with each other. **Figure 4.7** presents the graphical presentation of pairwise comparisons of challenges. It depicts that the Lack of NAAC Awareness stands out with the highest value of 4.77, followed by Other issues (4.69), Shortage of Qualified Faculty (4.31), Financial Issues (4.23), Inadequate Infrastructure (3.88), and Administrative Inefficiency (3.81). Staff Turnover, with a value of 2.31.

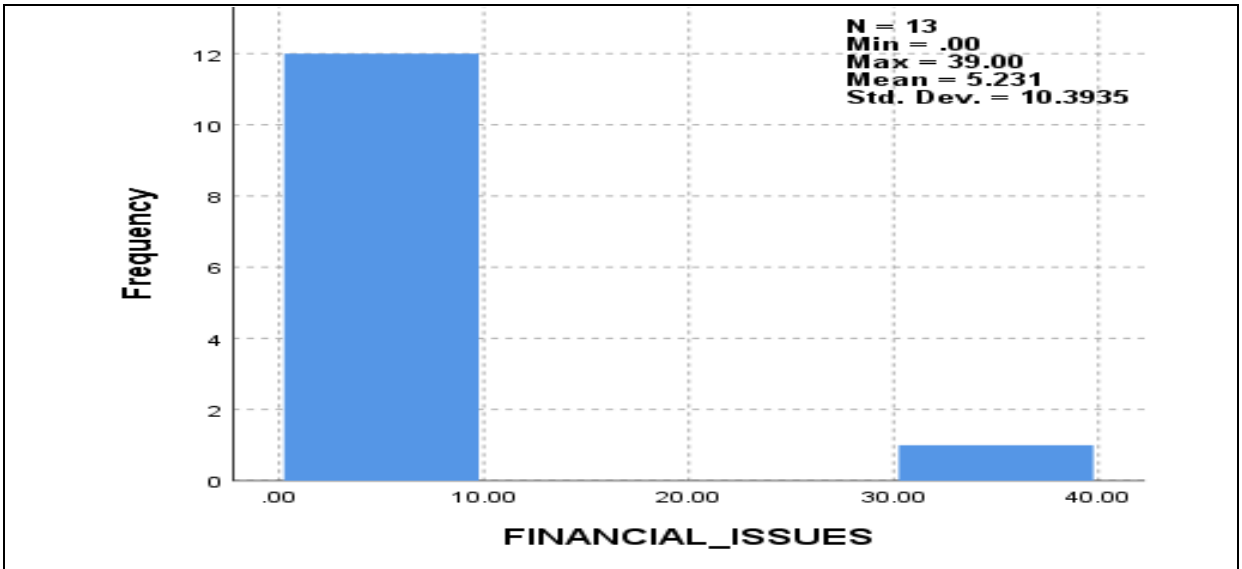


Note: SPSS 26

Figure 4.7

Pairwise Comparisons

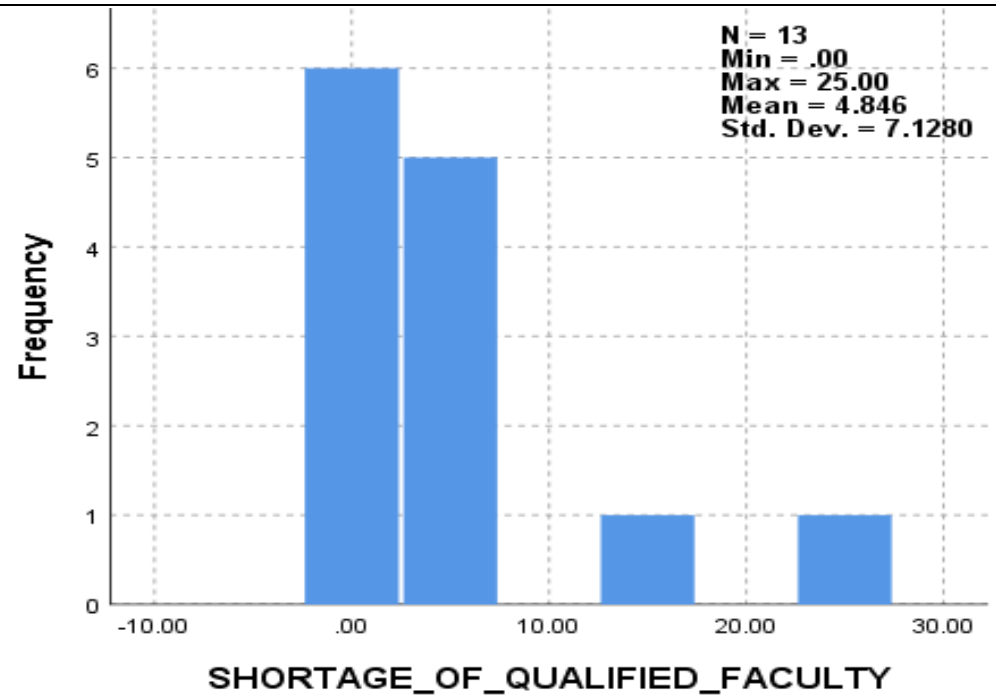
Figures 4.8 to 4.14 demonstrate the individual graphical representations of challenges faced by accredited and non-accredited Higher Education Institutions.



Note: SPSS 26

Figure 4.8

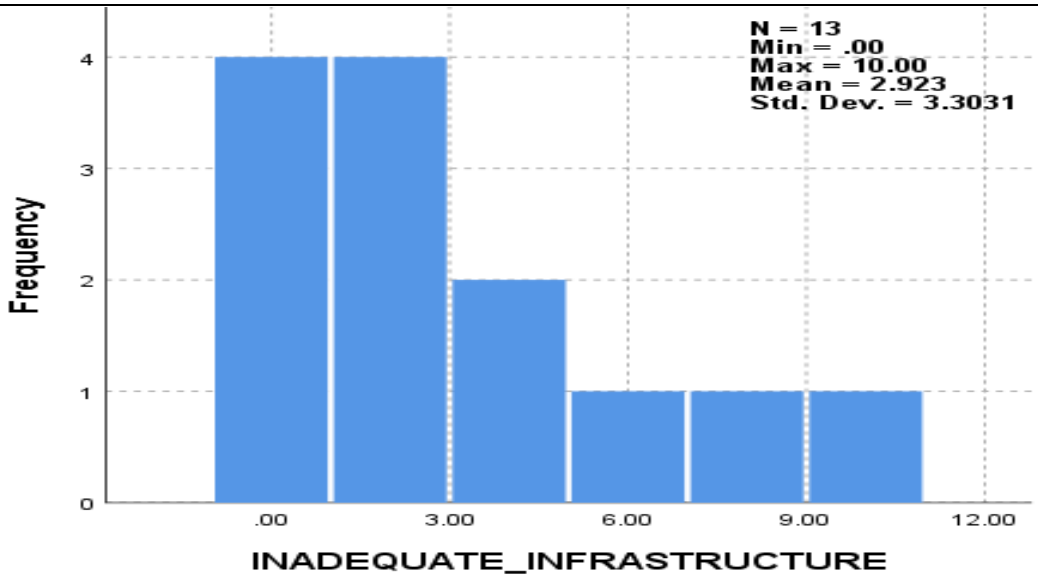
Continuous Field Information Financial Issues



Note: SPSS 26

Figure 4.9

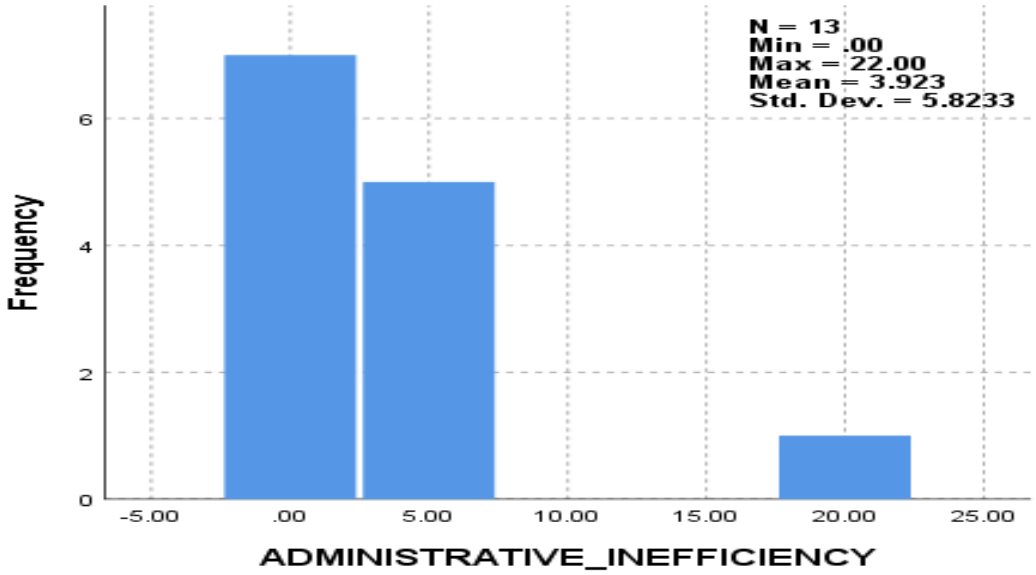
Continuous Field Information Shortage of Qualified Faculty



Note: SPSS 26

Figure 4.10

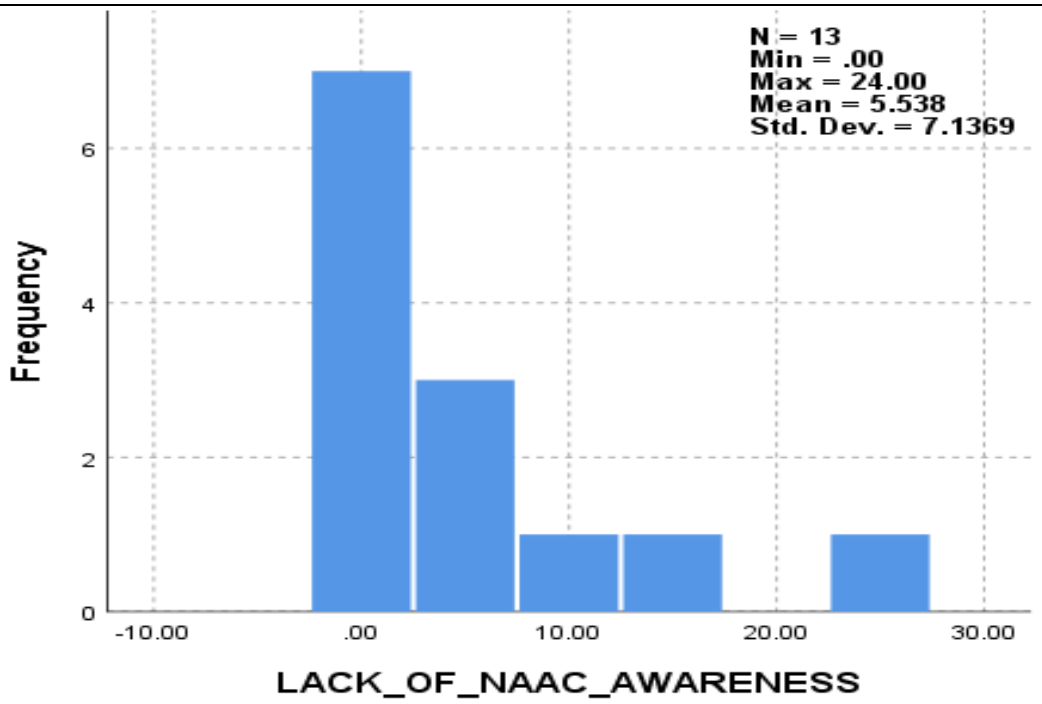
Continuous Field Information Inadequate Infrastructure



Note: SPSS 26

Figure 4.11

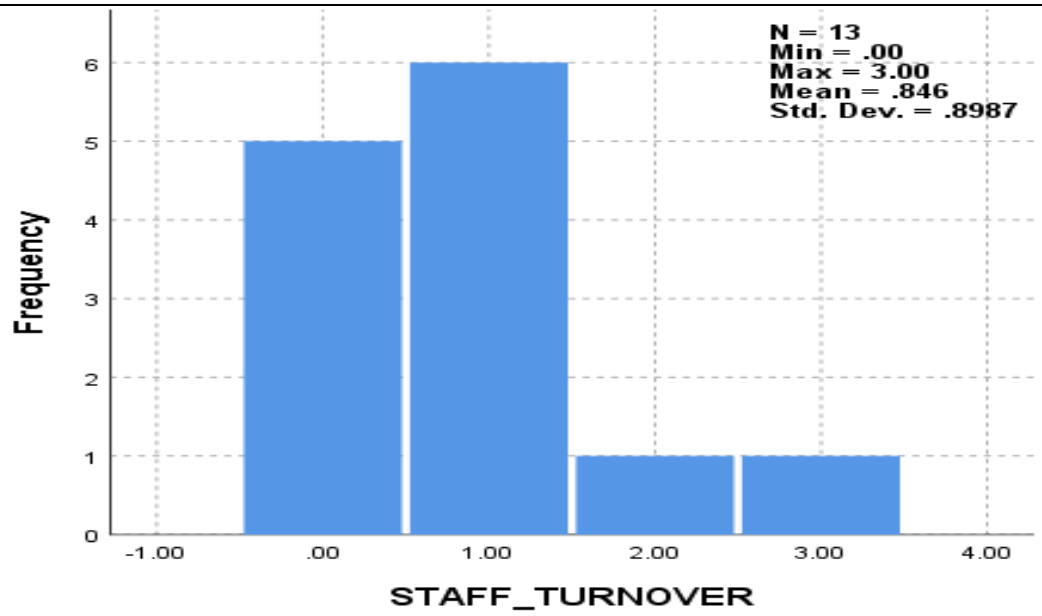
Continuous Field Information Administrative Inefficiency



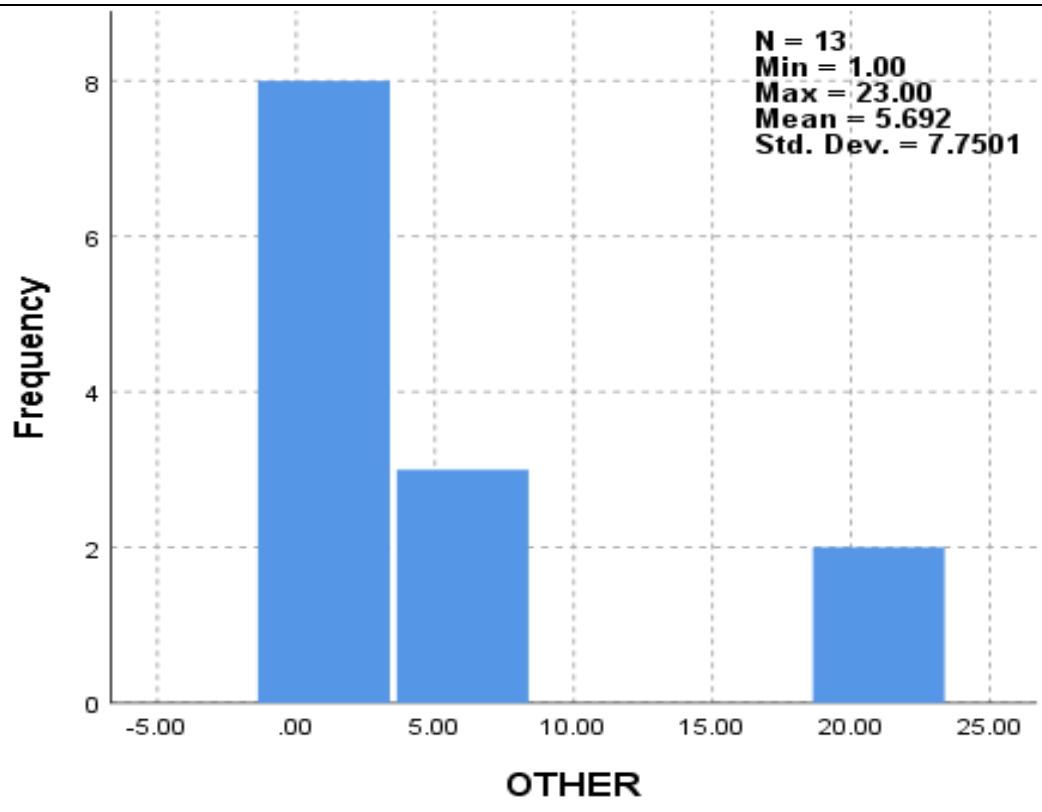
Note: SPSS 26

Figure 4.12

Continuous Field Information Lack of NAAC Awareness



Note: SPSS 26
Figure 4.13
Continuous Field Information Staff Turnover



Note: SPSS 26
Figure 4.14
Continuous Field Information Other

4.7 Summary of Findings

4.7.1 Demographic Details

This section covers the various demographic details of the respondents involved in the study:

Table 4.32
Demographic Details
Note: Data collected from the primary source

Age	Responses	Frequency (In %)
17-20	112	29.7
21-25	39	10.3
26-30	22	5.8
31-35	62	16.4
36-40	46	12.2
40-45	66	17.5
Above 45	30	8
Gender	Responses	Frequency (In %)
Male	162	43
Female	215	57
Marital Status	Responses	Frequency (In %)
Married	158	41.9
Unmarried	219	58.1
Annual Income		
100000-150000	123	32.6
150001-200000	25	6.6
200001-250000	36	9.5
250001-300000	36	9.5
300001-350000	48	12.7

350001-400000	26	6.9
400000-800000	67	17.8
Above 800000	16	4.2
Stakeholder	Responses	Frequency (In %)
Student	146	38.7
Parents	26	6.9
Teacher	129	34.2
Alumni	57	15.1
Industrialist	19	5

Figures 4.15 to 4.18 show the graphical presentation of demographic details of respondents. The study found that most respondents fall under the category of the 17-20 age group, and the fewest fall under the 26-30 age group. 57% respondents are female. Most of the respondents (58.1%) are unmarried. 32.6% respondents have an annual income between Rs. 100000-150000, and only 4.2% have more than Rs. 800000 annual incomes. Respondents comprise 38.7% respondents are students, 34.2% teachers, 15.1% alumni, 6.9& parents, and 5% are industrialists.

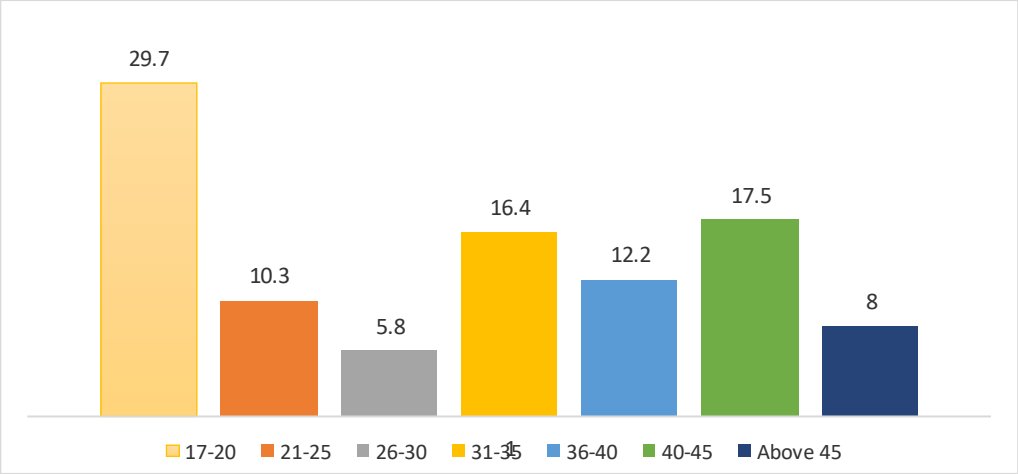


Figure 4.15
Age
Note: Data collected from the primary source

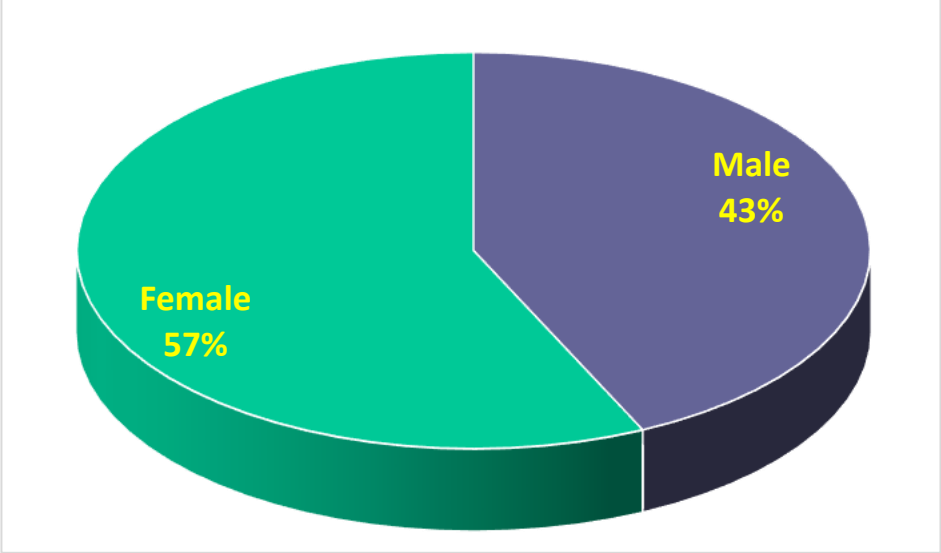


Figure 4.16
Gender
Note: Data collected from the primary source

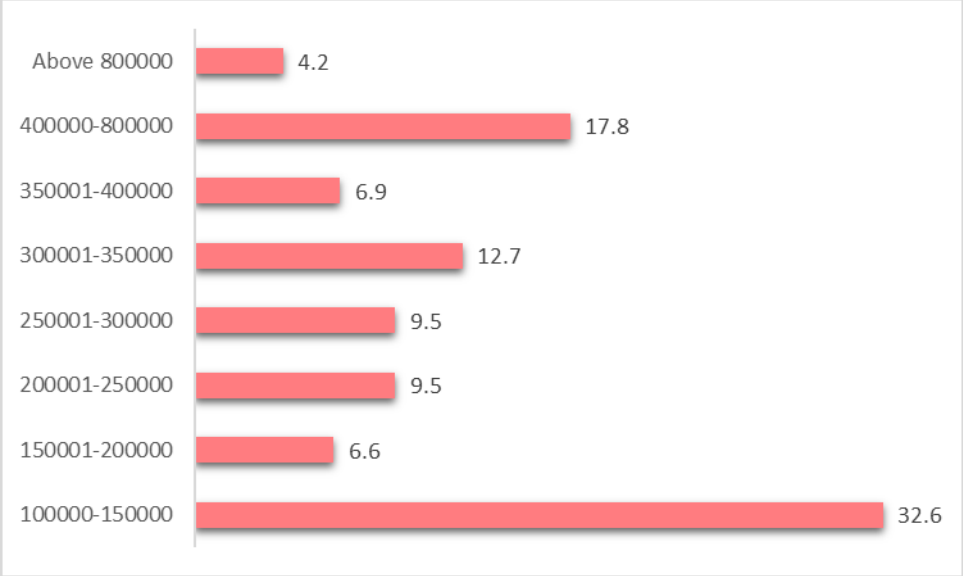


Figure 4.17
Annual Income
Note: *Data collected from the primary source*

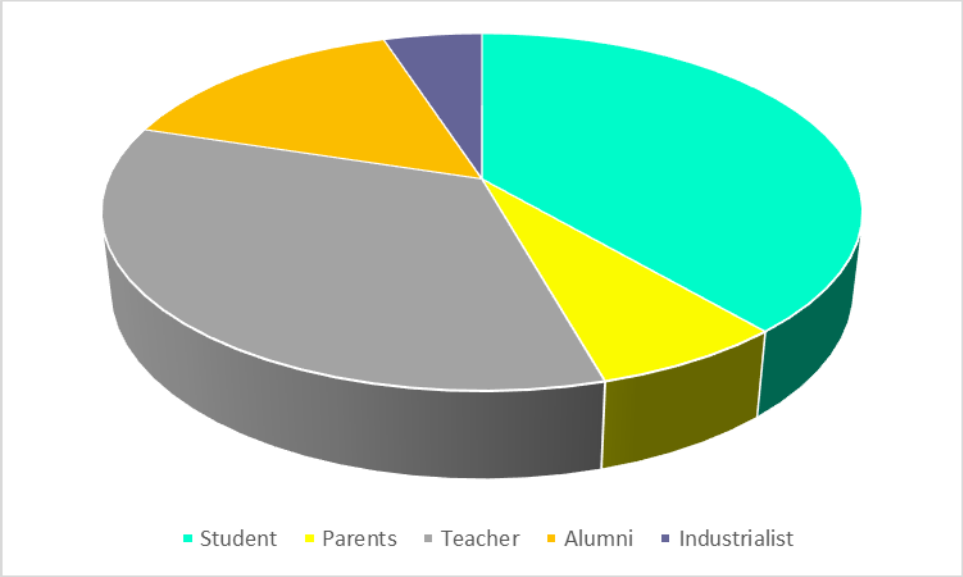


Figure 4.1
Stakeholder
Note: Data collected from the primary source

4.7.2 General Findings: These are the general findings of this study

- It was found that most respondents (23.9%) came to know about NAAC through teachers or staff, followed by institution website (21.2%), other (16.7%), Government or education department communication (11.7%), social media (10.9%), friends/relatives (9%) and newspaper (6.6%).

- The study also revealed that respondents understand the purpose of NAAC accreditation very well (24.1%), well (23.6%), somewhat (21.8%), not at all (11.7%), poorly (7.7%), Never heard of it and prefer not to say (5.6%).

- The study studied the awareness level of stakeholders about NAAC accreditation of Higher Education Institutions and found that most respondents were extremely aware (18.8%), moderately aware (18.6%), very aware (17%), not at all aware (14.3%), somewhat aware (12.7%), slightly aware (10.6%), and minimally aware (8%).

- Most respondents answered that they strongly agree (29.2%) with the NAAC accreditation process being mandatory for all higher education institutions, while some answered that they agree (28.6%), neutral (15.1%), not sure (13%), strongly disagree (5.8%), have no opinion (5.6%), and disagree (2.7%) with the mandatory condition.

- It was discovered that majority of respondents said that NAAC accreditation is a key factor (42.7%) for the decision to choose a college/university followed by Yes, but only among other factors (33.4%), No, I did not consider it (13.8%) and No, it doesn't matter much (10.1%).

4.8 Conclusion

Higher education in Madhya Pradesh has witnessed a dramatic change with institutional growth, policy changes, and an increased focus on quality assurance mechanisms such as NAAC accreditation. Overall, this study highlights the significant role of NAAC accreditation in shaping the dynamics of higher education within Madhya Pradesh. The findings confirm that awareness of NAAC accreditation significantly influences students' and parents' choice behavior, enhances perceived service quality, and stimulates consumer confidence in organizations. Accredited institutions always outperform non-accredited institutions across critical parameters such as infrastructure, faculty image, support to students, and brand image. There are important discrepancies, however, with non-accredited and rural institutions finding it harder to acquire and maintain accreditation due to issues like inadequate infrastructure, illiteracy, and financial constraints. These findings necessitate more inclusive policy assistance, capacity strengthening activities, and transparent accreditation practices to facilitate equitable quality development in all higher education institutions to achieve the goals of the National Education Policy 2020.

CHAPTER V:
DISCUSSION

5.1 Discussion of Results

The six research questions were framed to achieve the objectives of this study. These research questions were framed to keep the different angles of the Higher Education Sector in mind. All the research questions were tested, and their discussions are mentioned below:

5.2 Discussion of Research Question One

Does the awareness of NAAC accreditation influence the perceptions of students and parents selecting higher education institutions in Madhya Pradesh, India?

The study revolves around the NAAC accreditation influence on the perceived service quality and consumer confidence in Higher Education Institutions. Institutions may be accredited or non-accredited. The higher education institution is selected on the basis of various parameters such as awareness level and perceptions of stakeholders, NAAC accreditation, and its score. The stakeholders of the Higher Education Institutions are students, parents, teachers/staff, alumni, and industry.

This research shows how the awareness level of NAAC accreditation affects the perception of students and parents, and their consideration of the NAAC score while choosing higher education institutions. The findings of the research say that the awareness level of stakeholders is strongly related to the perception and consideration of the NAAC score for Higher Education selection. Martin & Stella (2007) discussed that accreditation is important because it influences students' career choices and indicates the quality of education they expect to receive. Most students see accreditation as a key factor in determining the legitimacy of an institution, which largely affects their decision to enrol in specific programs, especially in high-demand fields like technology, engineering, and management. Accredited Higher Education institutions are preferred by stakeholders for higher studies because accreditation usually emphasize gaining technical skills along with essential soft skills such as problem-solving, critical thinking, teamwork, and adaptability—abilities that are increasingly vital in a rapidly evolving digital world (Kumar et al., 2025). Research also

suggests that graduates from accredited programs generally have better job prospects and more positive career paths compared to those from non-accredited ones. counterparts (Yorke, 2006).

5.2 Discussion of Research Question Two

Does NAAC accreditation impact perceived service quality in higher education institutions?

NAAC accreditation impacts the Higher Education Institutions' selection process as indicated by and results of previous research question one. The study further moves towards the various service quality variables that are perceived by stakeholders for Higher Education Institutions. Before acquiring any kind of service, we perceive a certain level of service quality that we are going to obtain. This examines various perceived service quality variables of Higher Education under four categories: Tangible Service Variables (TSV), Reliability Service Variables (RSV), Responsiveness Service Variables (RPSV), Assurance Service Variables (ASV), and Empathy Service Variables (ESV) in Higher Education Institutions. Within these categories, several variables related to perceived service quality were selected. All the chosen Higher Education Institutions from different grading categories were also included. Respondents were asked to provide their feedback (using a ranking pattern from 1 to 7) on various service quality variables regarding their Higher Education Institutions. For service quality measurement, the study uses the SERVQUAL model of Higher Education service quality.

The SERVQUAL is a very effective model for evaluating the service quality of Higher Education Institutions. It is considered more appropriate for service quality because of its reliability in service quality measurement (Parasuraman et al., 1994; Walker and Lester, 2009; Pantouvakis, 2010; Das, 2023). It could be further adapted to a Higher Education context with the addition of various dimensions like "competence," "tangibles," "responsiveness," and "convenience." This adaptation is designed to position SERVQUAL as an even more appropriate measure for the specific dynamics of schools. By background, Stella and Gnanam (2004) put a premium on the imperative need for quality assurance in

distance and e-learning, something usually left behind in conventional speech. They noted that both face-to-face and online classrooms require serious quality monitoring and argued that the existing framework for measuring quality in distance education is weak and dated. Their research requires a complete overhaul of quality assurance procedures in e-learning in harmony with Dash's argument for the sharpening of tools for evaluation, like SERVQUAL, to suit the changing contours of the provision of education.

5.3 Discussion of Research Question Three

Does NAAC accreditation impact consumer confidence in higher education institutions?

The result shows that there is a very high degree of positive correlation between NAAC accreditation and consumer confidence in higher education institutions. The stakeholders regarding various consumer confidence variables in accredited and non-accredited higher education institutions. That means NAAC accreditation influences the consumers' confidence (stakeholders) in Higher Education Institutions. As per descriptive analysis, the Rank 2 & Rank 4 are the most consistent ranks for consumer confidence.

Ahluwalia (2024) identifies ten best practices in higher education as exemplars, such as curriculum integration, pedagogic innovation, research culture, and equitable student support systems. The research also identifies numerous challenges, such as funding constraints, teacher shortages, inconsistent standards of assessment, and being unable to sustain the quality of improvement. While NAAC's quality parameters build a strong scaffolding for institutional assessment, Ahluwalia (2024) notes that their execution necessitates context-dependent strategies, sustained resource endeavors, and sustained interface with stakeholders. Such findings have important ramifications for institutional managers, policymakers, and quality assurance agencies seeking to promote higher education in India and other emerging economies. Gottlieb and Beatson (2023) confirmed that higher educational decisions of prospective learners are usually being made based on three various dimensions of confidence. They identified, through thematic content analysis, 48 instances of confidence among the participants that were grouped under: "confidence in the decision to be

made," "confidence in the education provider's brand," and "confidence in the education provider's guidance counsellors.". "These elements operate separately, without proof of interrelation among the responses of the participants.

Bunce et al. (2017) employed mediation analysis to investigate whether learner identity, grade goals, fee responsibility, and academic discipline are mediated by consumer orientation towards their effect on academic performance. Independent t-tests were utilized as a preliminary analysis to determine variables that significantly affected consumer orientation. Independent t-tests were employed as initial analysis to ascertain variables significantly influencing consumer orientation. No differences were found in relation to work status, year of study, or gender. Consumer orientation did, however, significantly vary with extracurricular activity, course credit, volunteering, and age (Bunce et al., 2017).

5.4 Discussion of Research Question Four

Are there significant variations in service quality variables of accredited and non-accredited higher education institutions?

Accredited and non-accredited higher education institutions may have different perceptions of service quality. To examine this variation, stakeholder responses were collected, revealing a significant difference in perceived service quality between the two types of institutions. It was found that Extra-Curricular Engagement and Cultural and Emotional Support, Student Support Services and Resolution of Problems, Cleanliness and Maintenance, Accreditation and Recognition, and Mentorship Programs are the overall most significant predictors of perceived service quality in higher education institutions. Out of which Extra-Curricular Engagement and Cultural and Emotional Support are the most significant variables of perceived service quality among Accredited and non-accredited higher education institutions.

Furthermore, this difference between Accredited and non-accredited higher education institutions highlights important variations across service quality variables, as shown in several studies such as Cayon (2020). Accredited institutions tend to prioritize faculty quality, infrastructure development, and student support services more. In contrast, non-accredited

HEIs, according to Cayon (2020), often rely more on adjunct lecturers—specialists who face limited opportunities for career growth and fewer resources for research. These constraints have close linkages to lower levels of student achievement. In addition, accredited institutions normally possess higher asset-student ratios compared to non-accredited schools, which suggests higher resource efficiency in supporting students' welfare and academic well-being.

Such changes in service quality reflect broader institutional values. Accredited campuses are more likely to adhere to current standards of educational quality, while non-accredited campuses are more likely to focus on cost-cutting and profit-making, practices that can provoke academic and moral problems in the long term. Bennett et al. (2025) found that overall, students have a positive attitude toward accreditation, although they possess little knowledge of specialized accreditations, especially those related to business schools. The phenomenon where perceived value is high but understanding of the subject is low is common in many fields, particularly consumer-oriented ones. Based on the findings of the study, a model of perceived service quality for accredited and non-accredited higher education institutions was created and shown below:

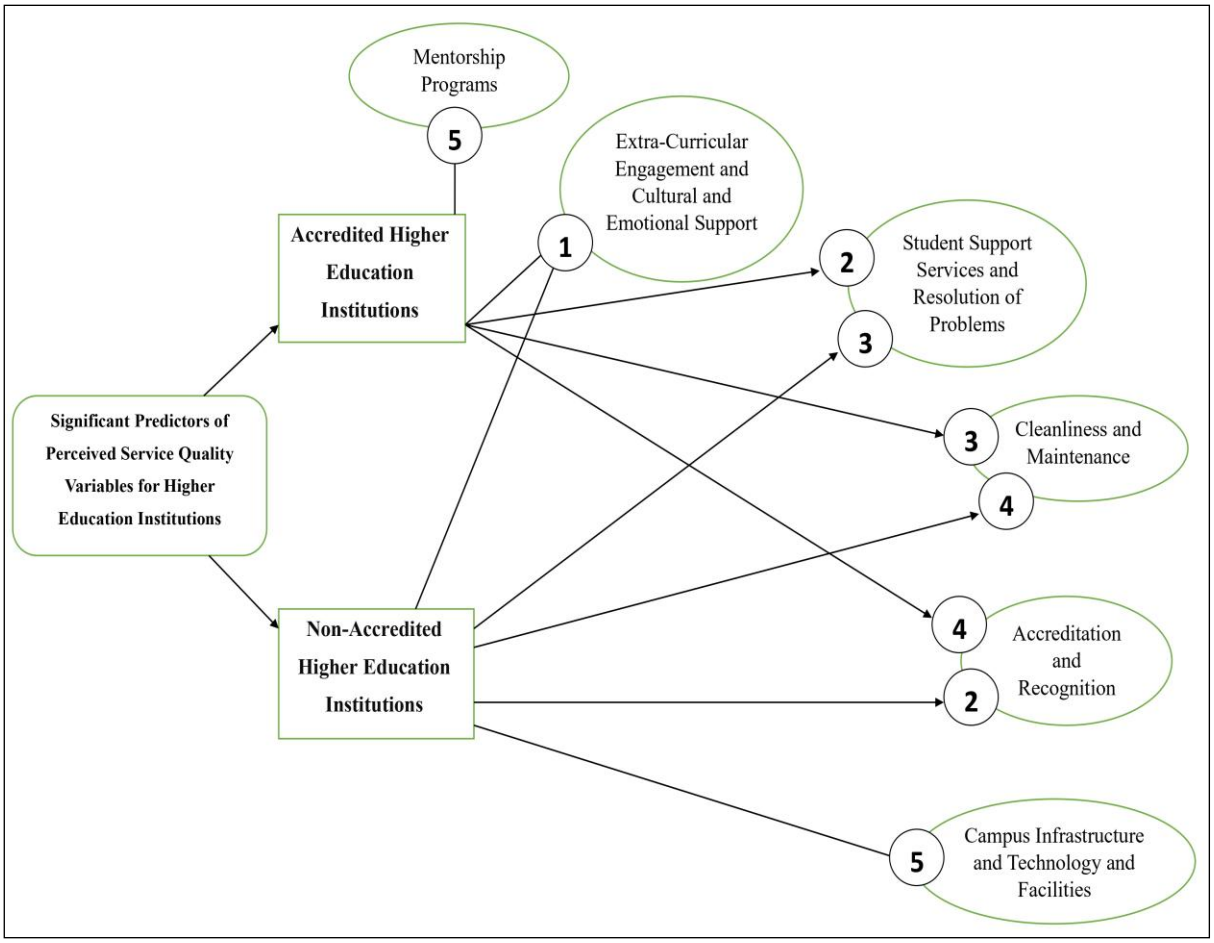


Figure: 5.1
Perceived Service Quality Model for Higher Education Institutions

5.5 Discussion of Research Question Five

Are there significant variations in consumer confidence variables among higher education institutions?

In the modern competitive higher education landscape, reputation and perceived quality are natural determinants of student choice and institutional success. Accredited/Leading institutions possess a strong home campus reputation based on tradition and prestige, which positively influences perceptions of their international branch campuses (Wilkins & Huisman, 2014). Academic reputation (AR) is an elemental component that underlies such reputational advantage, playing a very conspicuous role in institutional standing. Literature indicates that potential students recognize a quality AR with good postgraduate success and determine academic success, selectivity, and career readiness as the main characteristics (Conard & Conard, 2000). Meanwhile, establishing and ongoing

development of a solid brand image are crucial in recruiting high-quality faculty and students, hence enhancing the institution's reputation in the broader society (Berndt & Hollebeek, 2019).

In addition, peer influence—via social embedding, trust, networks, and benchmarking—is increasingly being at the center as a force behind students' university choices (Pham Thi et al., 2025). In this case, Curriculum flexibility is most relevant, setting out a reason why institutions must be capable of making rapid and sensible reactions to evolving expectations. Institutionalizing values such as stakeholder engagement, decision-making, innovation, and program development, Curriculum flexibility offers a way in which institutions can be competitive and responsive (Brink et al., 2021). Maybe most critically, accredited institutions are likely to be better at making these strategies work because they are based on trust and perceived quality, whereas non-accredited institutions have to strive harder at gaining consumer confidence through open, responsive, and student-focused practices.

The study revealed a significant difference between Accredited and non-accredited higher education institutions in their consumer confidence variables. It was discovered that Reputation of Faculty Members**,** Brand Image and Marketing**,** Peer Influence**,** Global Exposure and Recognition**,** Flexibility and Customization of Programs are significant predictors of consumer (stakeholders) confidence for selecting higher education institutions. Based on the findings of the study, a model of consumer confidence variables for accredited and non-accredited higher education institutions was created and shown below:

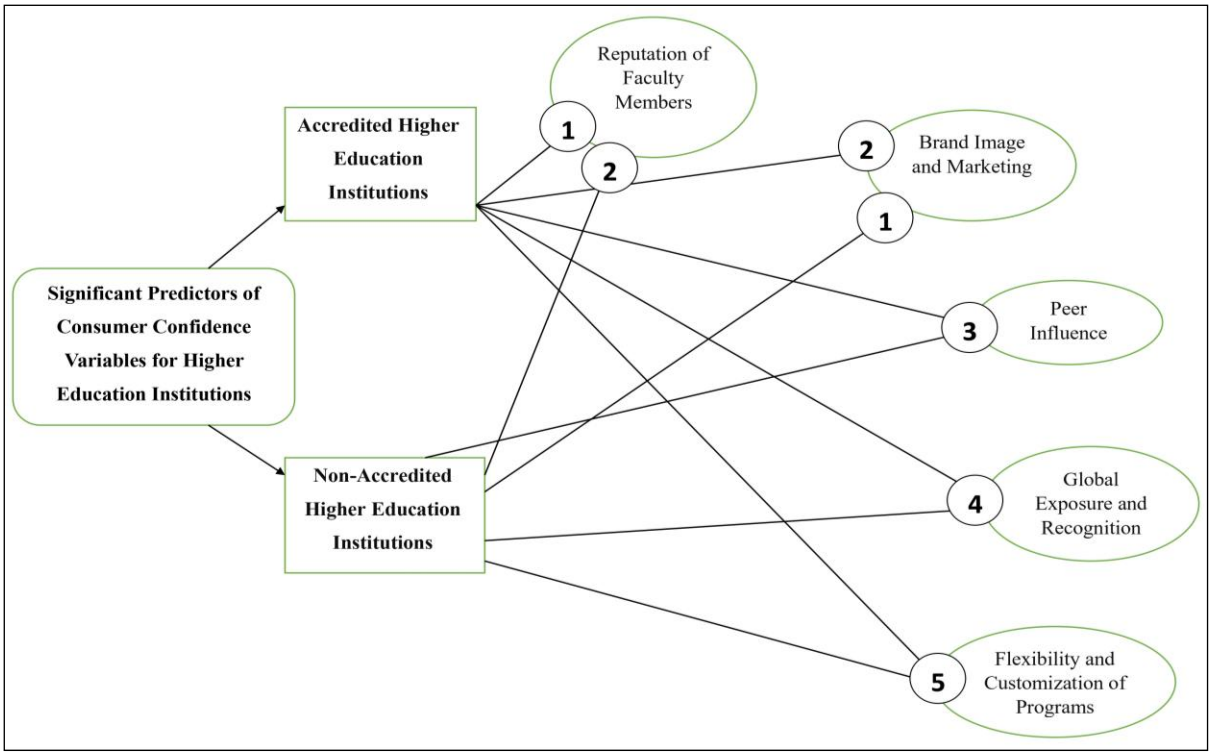


Figure 5.2
Consumer Confidence Model for Higher Education Institutions

5.6 Discussion of Research Question Six

Do the challenges faced by accredited and non-accredited higher education institutions differ in achieving or maintaining NAAC accreditation?

Accredited and non-accredited higher education institutions may face difficulties in achieving or maintaining NAAC accreditation. There are various challenges, such as financial issues, shortage of qualified faculty, inadequate infrastructure, administrative inefficiency, lack of NAAC awareness, staff turnover, and others. The study discovered that there is a significant difference between the challenges faced by accredited and non-accredited higher education Institutions. The top problem based on the findings is Lack of NAAC Awareness with a score of 4.77 followed by Other Issues (4.69), Shortage of Qualified Faculty (4.31), Financial Issues (4.23), Inadequate Infrastructure (3.88), and Administrative Inefficiency (3.81). The lowest is Staff Turnover at 2.31. Quality assurance practices in higher education institutions play a critical role in maintaining and promoting the learning and institutional service standards, posits Tiwari et al. (2024). The activities not only benefit the students but are also instrumental in maintaining the reputation and integrity of the

institution in academic and professional circles. Institutions that are quality assurance-focused are more attuned to evolving educational settings and better able to address the evolving needs of learners.

Tiwari et al. (2024) also concluded that accredited colleges had better infrastructure and teaching facilities than non-accredited ones. Accredited colleges had updated and easy-to-use official websites, whereas the websites of non-accredited colleges were not as friendly to users. Additionally, 6.2 accredited colleges operated with a clearly established vision, mission, and set of goals, while non-accredited colleges typically did not possess such pre-established institutional frameworks. Additionally, in the accredited colleges that were researched, three of them were the same ones that were ISO certified, and none of the non-accredited colleges had been ISO certified (Tiwari et al., 2024).

Sibi, K. J. (2020) highlighted the necessity of an electronically accessible Management Information System (MIS), with easy access to important information and documentation. Appointment of an Internal Quality Assurance Cell (IQAC) Coordinator, he maintained, has to be made through an external expert committee that will include members from the current staff. Additionally, faculty members who have already worked as coordinators during the accreditation process are to be upgraded to the professor level for their leadership qualities towards quality enhancement. Sibi also proposed tweaking onsite visits by incorporating an observer from the concerned university and recommended incorporating an in-service IQAC Coordinator as the fourth member of the Peer Team to maintain coordination. Additionally, he emphasized the inclusion of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) in models for assessment. Early reimbursement of cost and robust emphasis on transparency and accountability should be pillars of quality assessment. Above all, he stressed the importance of common sense in achieving such reforms (Sibi, 2020).

CHAPTER VI:

SUMMARY, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Summary

Indian higher education is transforming at a rapid rate marked by policy-level reform, massification, and greater focus on quality assurance. Accreditation has become one of the key drivers of institutional accountability, transparency, and competitiveness in this new context. Among the leading accreditation agencies, the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) has played a significant role in institutional assessment and benchmarking.

The present study analysed the varied impacts of NAAC accreditation across different colleges and universities in Madhya Pradesh across dimensions like institutional quality, stakeholder perception, and consumer confidence. Six research questions guided the inquiry regarding the interrelation between awareness of accreditation, perceived service quality, consumer confidence, service gaps, institutional challenges, and overall stakeholder perception.

It was observed that NAAC accreditation awareness significantly impacts students' and parents' choices in institutional selection. Accreditation not only acts as an external quality indicator and internal assurance of performance, but also affects perceptions of institutional credibility, academic quality, and career prospects. Accreditation is associated by stakeholders with enhanced infrastructure, grievance redressal, instructional performance, and emotional and academic counseling.

Drawing on the SERVQUAL model, the research established that accredited higher learning institutions have superior standards in areas such as tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. They are not only accountable for enhanced service delivery but also for institutional viability and student satisfaction. In addition, accreditation is strongly related to consumer trust that creates confidence among all stakeholders owing to guaranteed ethical practice, governance, and quality.

The study also showed large differences in service quality between accredited and non-accredited institutions. Accredited institutions are more responsive, better resourced, and offer comprehensive academic and emotional care. Non-accredited institutions, however, experience issues of poor infrastructure, lack of staff, and poor services. These differences hinder stakeholder satisfaction and the competitiveness of the institutions.

Consumer confidence varied between accredited and non-accredited institutions. Accredited institutions offer more program flexibility, instructor quality, international exposure, and responsiveness that feed brand value and stakeholder loyalty. Non-accredited institutions suffer from a legitimacy problem and depend on local networks and word-of-mouth branding.

The study mentioned several difficulties in gaining and retaining NAAC accreditation. Some of the key difficulties include limited knowledge about the procedure for accreditation, inadequate facilities, inadequate staff, and bureaucratic inefficiencies. Even accredited organizations bear the responsibility for maintaining the improvements and avoiding a tick-box compliance culture.

Finally, the study has important policy and practice implications. Raising public awareness, building capacity for poor-resource institutions, sharpening accreditation models, and promoting evidence-based quality assurance frameworks are all steps of necessity in order to deploy accreditation as both a quality gauge and a change agent for Indian higher education.

6.2 Implications

Findings of this study have significant implications for policymakers, institutional leaders, quality assurance agencies, and other stakeholders of India's higher education system.

Second, the widespread use of NAAC accreditation by students and parents in their decisions implies that it serves not only as a performance assessment mechanism but as an institutional indicator of legitimacy, quality, and employability. Institutional and regulatory

agencies, therefore, need to invest resources in campaigns and education to create public awareness and knowledge about the significance, worth, and necessity of accreditation. Second, accreditation is found to have a clear effect on service quality, with accredited institutions evaluated as more reliable and student-centered. This not only affects the learning atmosphere but also the psychosocial well-being of the students. Institutional managers, therefore, must give strong emphasis to integral quality management such as infrastructure, support systems for affect, teaching staff development, and administrative effectiveness. Thirdly, accreditation leads to enhanced consumer confidence. NAAC-accredited institutions are thought to be more credible, competent, and career-focused. Industry partners and alumni are likely to invest in and participate in these institutions. Through quality assurance and transparency, therefore, institutions need to establish and sustain consumer confidence for growth.

Fourth, the large service disparities among accredited and non-accredited institutions highlight system disparities, especially for rural or under-resourced college locations. This suggests certain policy focus that helps develop the capacity of non-accredited institutions via mentoring, funding, and technical support.

Fifth, accreditation is as burdensome as becoming accredited. It is not common for institutions to have poor institutional capacity or awareness to meet the NAAC standards, particularly in rural and semi-urban areas. Revoking policy support, denying mentorship by accredited institutions, as well as failing to simplify accreditation processes would ensure that there are gaps, impacting the comprehensiveness of higher education reform. Finally, the operation of Internal Quality Assurance Cells (IQACs) must be accorded very high priority. They must become proactive and evidence-based, inculcating a culture for improvement and mapping institutional activities to accreditation requirements and educational imperatives.

6.3 Suggestions for Future Studies

Under the results of this research, there are some of them that need additional scholarship and practice research towards shedding the broader implications of accreditation on Indian higher education:

Studies on Longitudinal Accreditation Effect:

Data on longitudinal institutional performance, student outcome, and stakeholder engagement before and after attaining NAAC accreditation would be needed. These would tell us about a change in quality in the long term.

1. **Comparative State-Zone Studies**: Research work can extend the spatial level to compare within Indian states or zones, the impact of accreditation. Comparison can identify the impact of policymaking context and infrastructure differences between states and regions on the explanation of the accreditation outcome.

2. **Stakeholder-Specific Perception Analysis**: Analysis at the individual stakeholder group-disaggregated level, i.e., employers, alumni, or faculty, may provide more precise data regarding the perception of each group regarding accredited and non-accredited institutions.

3. **Technology and Digital Readiness in Accreditation**: With education becoming increasingly digital, future research must rise to the challenge of assessing how digital infrastructure and online pedagogy are assessed in accreditation processes, and how their effects inform perception by stakeholders.

4. **Institutional Readiness and Mentorship Models**: Future empirical evidence will establish the effectiveness of capacity development and mentorship models leading to institutions being ready for accreditation, particularly in rural or disadvantaged environments.

5. **Accreditation Framework Reform:** Future studies can investigate to what extent the current NAAC model is flexible and responsive to new models of learning like online learning, vocational learning, or collaboration-based courses, through international collaborations.

6.4 Conclusion

This research is a rich contribution to the knowledge about the multi-dimensional impact of NAAC accreditation for stakeholders, institutions, and the Indian higher education system. This is consistent with the idea that accreditation is not merely an administrative process, but a means to guarantee quality, equity, and trust in higher education. The study finds that accreditation impacts the stakeholders' perception, quality of service, consumer confidence, and institutional sustainability. Accredited institutions will be most likely to be viewed as more credible, well-trained, and accountable to pursue study and career plans. Non-accredited institutions are structurally and perceptually disadvantaged and will be less competitive and attractive.

But accrediting is beset by problems--varied in character, from infrastructure and human resource gaps to an overall deficiency of perception and administrative preparedness, particularly in rural parts of the country. Such are problems requiring front-foot policy action, well-defined mentorship programs, and streamlined accreditation processes. For the National Education Policy (NEP) to become a reality, accreditation will have to re-invent itself as a seal of quality and as a mechanism of change. It will have to be institutionalized as an ongoing, participative, and evolutionary process. It requires more coordination among the regulatory agencies, institutions, teachers, students, and community members.

In fact, the findings of this study require an holistic, adaptive, and equity-based accreditation process that not only assures minimum requirements but, on the contrary, inspires innovation, inclusiveness, and continuous excellence in Indian higher education.

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APPENDIX A

Table 1
List of NAAC Accredited Colleges

S. No.	Code	College Name	Division	District	Grade	CGPA
1	3103	Govt. College, Multai	Bhopal	Betul	C	1.97
2	3310	Govt Tilak College, Katni	Jabalpur	Katni	B++	2.99
3	2006	Govt College, Bagli	Ujjain	Dewas	B	2.08
4	3706	Govt College, Chhapara	Jabalpur	Seoni	C	1.87
5	3301	Govt Science College, Jabalpur	Jabalpur	Jabalpur	A	3.1
6	3701	Govt P G College, Seoni	Jabalpur	Seoni	B	2.36
7	3303	Govt M H College of Home Science & Science for Women, Jabalpur	Jabalpur	Jabalpur	B+	2.64
8	2411	Govt P. G. College, Sendhawa	Indore	Barwani	B+	2.57
9	1006	Govt P G College, Bina	Sagar	Sagar	B	2.2
10	1607	Govt Mahatma Gandhi College, Jawad	Ujjain	Neemuch	C	1.91
11	2106	Govt College, Thandla	Indore	Jhabua	C	1.88
12	2207	Govt College, Dharampuri	Indore	Dhar	C	1.79
13	3702	Govt Girls College, Seoni	Jabalpur	Seoni	C	1.78
14	1412	Govt College, Pushparajgarh	Rewa	Anuppur	C	1.66
15	3705	Govt College, Barghat	Jabalpur	Seoni	C	1.6
16	603	Govt Nehru Degree College, Ashoknagar	Gwalior	Ashoknagar	C	1.55
17	3308	Govt College, Kundam	Jabalpur	Jabalpur	B	2.04
18	1205	Govt Vivekanand College, Maihar	Rewa	Satna	C	2
19	1306	Govt Shahid Kedarnath P G College, Mauganj	Rewa	Rewa	C	1.94
20	608	Govt College, Aron	Gwalior	Guna	C	1.9
21	306	Govt Virangna Jhalkari Bai Girls College, Gwalior	Gwalior	Gwalior	C	1.85
22	3805	Govt College, Paraswada	Jabalpur	Balaghat	C	1.84
23	2601	Govt College, Rajgarh	Bhopal	Rajgarh	C	1.76
24	2201	Govt P G College, Dhar	Indore	Dhar	C	1.64
25	2302	Shri Atal Bihari Vajpai Govt Arts and Commerce College, Indore	Indore	Indore	B+	2.65
26	2403	Govt P G College, Badwani	Indore	Barwani	B	2.47
27	3302	Govt Mahakaushal Arts and Commerce	Jabalpur	Jabalpur	B	2.36

		College, Jabalpur				
28	1604	Govt Sitaram Jaju Girls College, Neemuch	Ujjain	Neemuch	B	2.31
29	3009	Raja Bhoj Govt College, Mandideep	Indore	Raisen	B	2.31
30	3002	Govt Girls College, Raisen	Bhopal	Raisen	C	1.94
31	3703	Swami Vivekanand Govt College, Lakhanadon	Bhopal	Seoni	C	1.93
32	2405	Govt College, Badwaha	Indore	Khargone	C	1.84
33	3209	Shri Makhanlal Chaturvedi Govt College, Babai	Bhopal	Hoshangabad	C	1.78
34	803	Govt Chhatrasal Maharaja College, Maharajpur	Sagar	Chhatarpur	C	1.67
35	1811	Govt Madhav Arts and Commerce College, Ujjain	Ujjain	Ujjain	C	1.82
36	2304	Govt M L B Girls P G Colege, Kilabhawan, Indore	Indore	Indore	B+	2.6
37	2502	Govt Girls College, Khandwa	Indore	Khandwa	B	2.37
38	2801	Govt Adarsh Motilal Vigyan Mahavidyalaya, Bhopal	Bhopal	Bhopal	B	2.25
39	3801	Govt Jatashankar Trivedi College, Balaghat	Jabalpur	Balaghat	B	2.14
40	2007	Govt College, Hatpipalya	Ujjain	Dewas	B	2.1
41	1901	Govt Balkrishna Sharma Navin P G College, Shajapur	Ujjain	Shajapur	B	2.06
42	207	Govt College, Mehgaon	Gwalior	Bhind	C	1.88
43	2202	Govt Girls College, Dhar	Indore	Dhar	C	1.8
44	2211	Govt College, Pithampur	Indore	Dhar	C	1.75
45	609	Govt College, Raghogarh	Sagar	Guna	C	1.66
46	1010	Govt College, Khurai	Sagar	Sagar	C	1.66
47	202	Govt Girls College, Bhind	Gwalior	Bhind	C	1.65
48	1411	Govt College, Umariya	#N/A	Umaria	C	1.86
49	3210	Govt Mahatma Gandhi Smrati College, Itarsi	Bhopal	Hoshangabad	B	2.02
50	3201	Govt Narmada College, Hoshangabad	Bhopal	Hoshangabad	B	2.22
51	3312	Govt College, Barhi	Jabalpur	Katni	B	2.14
52	304	Govt M L B Arts and Commerce College, Gwalior	Gwalior	Gwalior	A	3.07
53	2902	Govt Girls College, Sehore	Bhopal	Sehore	B	2.14
54	3507	Govt College, Bhuabichhiya	Jabalpur	Mandla	C	1.88

55	1602	Govt Girls College, Mandsaur	Ujjain	Mandsaur	B	2.19
56	2401	Govt P G College, Khargone	Indore	Khargone	B++	2.81
57	3605	Govt College, Junardev	Jabalpur	Chhindwara	B	2.27
58	1812	Govt Madhav Science College, Ujjain	Ujjain	Ujjain	A++	3.58
59	1906	Swamy Vivekanand Govt College, Susner	Ujjain	Agar malwa	C	2
60	2804	Govt Hamidia Arts and Commerce College, Bhopal	Bhopal	Bhopal	B+	2.73
61	2404	Govt Girls College, Badwani	Indore	Barwani	B	2.36
62	401	Govt P G College, Datia	Gwalior	Datia	B	2.09
63	3708	Govt College, Shahpur	Bhopal	Betul	C	1.9
64	2902	Govt Girls College, Sehore	Bhopal	Sehore	B	2.14
65	1606	Govt College, Rampura	Ujjain	Neemuch	B	2.38
66	1202	Govt Girls College, Satna	Rewa	Satna	B	2.36
67	1407	Govt Arts and Commerce College, Jaysinghnagar	Rewa	Shahdol	B	2.21
68	1907	Govt College, Kalapipal	Ujjain	Shajapur	B	2.17
69	3404	Govt Thakur Niranjan Singh College, Gotegaon	Jabalpur	Narsinghpur	B	2.08
70	2303	Govt Mata Jija Bai Girls P G College, Moti Tabela, Indore	Indore	Indore	B	2.24
71	2313	Govt Arts and Commerce College, Rau	Indore	Indore	B	2.47
72	2608	Govt College, Jeerapur	Bhopal	Rajgarh	C	1.9
73	3304	Govt M K B Arts and Commerce College, Jabalpur	Jabalpur	Jabalpur	B+	2.62
74	3806	Govt College, Katangi	Jabalpur	Balaghat	C	1.89
75	3402	Govt Shyamsundar Mushran Girls College, Narsinghpur	Jabalpur	Narsinghpur	B	2.23
76	606	Govt Girls College, Chachoda	Gwalior	Guna	C	1.67
77	2501	Govt Shri Nilkantheshwar P G College, Khandwa	Indore	Khandwa	B+	2.64
78	2003	Govt College, Sonkacha	Ujjain	Dewas	C	1.94
79	1703	Govt Commerce College, Ratlam	Ujjani	Ratlam	B+	2.74
80	2012	Tukojirao Pawar Govt Science College, Dewas	Ujjain	Dewas	B	2.35
81	2105	Govt Mahaveer College, Petlawad	Indore	Jhabua	C	1.98
82	1201	Govt P G College, Satna	Rewa	Satna	B	2.29

83	311	Govt Vrinda Sahay College, Dabra	Gwalior	Gwalior	B	2.09
84	1409	Govt College, Kotma	Rewa	Anuppur	C	1.96
85	2005	Govt College, Khategaon	Ujjain	Dewas	C	1.54
86	3601	Govt P G College, Chhindwara	Jabalpur	Chhindwara	B	2.24
87	2810	Govt Swami Vivekanand Degree College, Berasiya	Bhopal	Bhopal	B+	2.51
88	3202	Govt Home Science Girls P G College, Hoshangabad	Bhopal	Hoshangabad	B++	2.96
89	706	Govt College, Palera	Sagar	Tikamgarh	C	1.62
90	3107	Govt College, Sarni	Bhopal	Betul	B	2.31
91	2806	Govt Gitanjali Girls P G College, Bhopal	Bhopal	Bhopal	B	2.33
92	2802	Govt M L B Girls P G College, Bhopal	Bhopal	Bhopal	B++	2.98
93	1402	Govt Indira Gandhi Home Science College, Shahdol	Rewa	Shahdol	B++	2.8
94	103	Govt College, Sheopur	Gwalior	Sheopur	B	2.32
95	703	Govt College, Niwari	Sagar	Niwari	B	2.3
96	501	Govt P G College, Shivpuri	Gwalior	Shivpuri	C	1.92
97	2606	Govt College, Narsinghgarh	Bhopal	Rajgarh	C	1.89
98	3001	Govt Swami Vivekanand College, Raisen	Bhopal	Raisen	B	2.41
99	701	Govt P G College, Tikamgarh	Sagar	Tikamgarh	B	2.5
100	303	Govt Adarsh Science College, Gwalior	Gwalior	Gwalior	A	3.22
101	3007	Govt College, Gairatganj	Bhopal	Raisen	C	1.87
102	804	Raja Harpalsingh Govt College, Harpalpur	Sagar	Chhatarpur	C	1.85
103	3501	Govt Rani Durgawati College, Mandla	Jabalpur	Mandla	B+	2.72
104	1101	Govt P G College, Damoh	Sagar	Damoh	B+	2.7
105	3306	Govt Girls College, Ranjhi	Jabalpur	Jabalpur	B++	2.99
106	2808	Govt Arts & Commerce College Malviya Hostel, Bhopal	Bhopal	Bhopal	C	1.83

Note:

https://highereducation.mp.gov.in/?page=UC8zXZquP7LxAOCZi1JPdA%3D%3D&orgid=20646280_State-wise-list--of-colleges-accredited-by-NAAC.pdf

Table 2
List of Selected GOVT. NAAC Accredited Colleges

S.No	Code	College Name	Division	District	Grade	CGPA
1	3310	Govt Tilak College, Katni	Jabalpur	Katni	B++	2.99
2	3301	Govt Science College, Jabalpur	Jabalpur	Jabalpur	A	3.1
3	3303	Govt M H College of Home Science & Science for Women, Jabalpur	Jabalpur	Jabalpur	B+	2.64
4	306	Govt Virangna Jhalkari Bai Girls College, Gwalior	Gwalior	Gwalior	C	1.85
5	2302	Shri Atal Bihari Vajpai Govt Arts and Commerce College, Indore	Indore	Indore	B+	2.65
6	3302	Govt Mahakaushal Arts and Commerce College, Jabalpur	Jabalpur	Jabalpur	B	2.36
7	1811	Govt Madhav Arts and Commerce College, Ujjain	Ujjain	Ujjain	C	1.82
8	2304	Govt M L B Girls P G Colege, Kilabhawan, Indore	Indore	Indore	B+	2.6
9	2801	Govt Adarsh Motilal Vigyan Mahavidyalaya, Bhopal	Bhopal	Bhopal	B	2.25
10	304	Govt M L B Arts and Commerce College, Gwalior	Gwalior	Gwalior	A	3.07
11	1812	Govt Madhav Science College, Ujjain	Ujjain	Ujjain	A++	3.58
12	2804	Govt Hamidia Arts and Commerce College, Bhopal	Bhopal	Bhopal	B+	2.73
13	2303	Govt Mata Jija Bai Girls P G College, Moti Tabela, Indore	Indore	Indore	B	2.24
14	3304	Govt M K B Arts and Commerce College, Jabalpur	Jabalpur	Jabalpur	B+	2.62
15	2806	Govt Gitanjali Girls P G College, Bhopal	Bhopal	Bhopal	B	2.33
16	2802	Govt M L B Girls P G College, Bhopal	Bhopal	Bhopal	B++	2.98
17	303	Govt Adarsh Science College, Gwalior	Gwalior	Gwalior	A	3.22
18	3306	Govt Girls College, Ranjhi	Jabalpur	Jabalpur	B++	2.99
19	2808	Govt Arts & Commerce College Malviya Hostel, Bhopal	Bhopal	Bhopal	C	1.83

Note:

https://highereducation.mp.gov.in/?page=UC8zXZquP7LxAOCZi1JPdA%3D%3D&orgid=20646280_State-wise-list--of-colleges-accredited-by-NAAC.pdf