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A Perception Study on Teacher Engagement and Administrative Workload during NAAC Accreditation

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Abstract

Background: Accreditation by the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) is now a defining feature of Indian higher education governance. Although its stated purpose is quality enhancement, the process generates a dense layer of documentation, committee work, data entry and evidence-gathering that falls largely on teachers. Whether this administrative load strengthens or erodes teacher engagement remains insufficiently examined.

Objective: To synthesise and critically appraise perception-based evidence on the relationship between administrative workload during NAAC accreditation and teacher engagement, and to expose the gap between the policy ideal of accreditation and the lived reality reported by academics.

Methods: A PRISMA-guided structured scoping synthesis was conducted. A curated corpus of 117 bibliographic records was screened against pre-specified criteria, with priority given to 2023–2024 publications, and was supplemented by purposively selected external theoretical, empirical and policy sources. Evidence was analysed thematically and compared across four vantage points: teachers, administrators, accrediting bodies and students.

Results: Eighteen of the 117 records were published in 2023–2024; eight addressed NAAC or accreditation quality assurance directly and formed the core evidence set. Four convergent themes emerged: (i) documentation intensity displaces pedagogic and scholarly time; (ii) compliance is frequently ceremonial rather than developmental; (iii) workload is unevenly distributed and poorly recognised; and (iv) engagement is shaped by perceived autonomy, fairness and meaningfulness rather than by workload volume alone. A comparative matrix shows systematic divergence between institutional and teacher perceptions.

Conclusions: The available evidence supports a conditional rather than a uniform conclusion: accreditation workload is most damaging to engagement when it is opaque, duplicative, unrecognised and disconnected from teaching and learning. Five testable propositions and a measurement framework are proposed to enable primary empirical verification.

Keywords: NAAC; accreditation; teacher engagement; administrative workload; quality assurance; higher education; India; job demands–resources

1. Introduction

Quality assurance has become one of the most consequential administrative technologies in contemporary higher education. In India, the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) occupies a central position within this architecture, and its processes now shape institutional planning, resource allocation, public reputation and, increasingly, regulatory eligibility [1,2]. Accreditation is typically presented as a collective exercise in self-

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improvement, in which institutions examine their curricular, research, infrastructural and governance practices against published indicators and then use the findings to improve [2,3]. The conceptual vocabulary is that of enhancement, transparency and accountability.

The lived experience of the people who carry out this work is less often examined. Behind every self-study report lies a large volume of labour: gathering evidence for hundreds of metrics, reconciling data across departments, preparing files for peer teams, organising stakeholder feedback, drafting narrative responses and rehearsing for site visits. In most institutions this labour is not performed by a dedicated professional cadre. It is distributed across teaching staff, who must absorb it alongside lectures, assessment, mentoring, examination duties and their own research. The central question of this paper is therefore both simple and uncomfortable: what happens to teacher engagement when the machinery of quality assurance is operated by the very people whose teaching it claims to improve?

The question is not merely rhetorical. The notion of quality in higher education has long been contested, and Harvey and Green's classic analysis showed that quality may be understood as exception, perfection, fitness for purpose, value for money or transformation, each carrying different implications for what should be measured and by whom [4]. An accreditation regime that emphasises conformity to documented indicators privileges some of these meanings and marginalises others, particularly the transformative meaning that most teachers regard as the heart of their vocation. When the meaning of quality is operationalised as the production of evidence, the work of producing evidence may crowd out the very practices the evidence is supposed to represent.

Engagement is the second concept at stake. Following Kahn, personal engagement refers to the harnessing of organisational members' selves to their work roles, whereby people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively and emotionally during role performance [5]. Later empirical work conceptualised work engagement as a positive, fulfilling state characterised by vigour, dedication and absorption, and positioned it as the conceptual opposite of burnout [6]. Within the job demands–resources framework, engagement is sustained when job resources such as autonomy, feedback, collegial support and recognition are sufficient to offset job demands, and is eroded when demands, particularly hindrance demands, overwhelm those resources [7]. Administrative load is a paradigmatic hindrance demand: it consumes effort without contributing proportionately to the intrinsic goals of the role.

The wider scholarship on the managerial university suggests that this is not a uniquely Indian problem. Anderson's analysis of academic time in managerial settings described how accountability systems fragment working days and compel staff to negotiate, resist or accommodate demands that are only loosely related to their professional priorities [8]. What is distinctive about the Indian context is the scale and pace of change. NAAC is moving from letter-grade evaluation towards binary accreditation and maturity-based graded levels, alongside a national initiative to consolidate data submissions so that institutions report once rather than repeatedly to multiple agencies [9]. The same source reports that roughly four in ten universities and just under one in five colleges are accredited or participating in NAAC accreditation, which implies that an enormous population of institutions, and therefore of teachers, has yet to experience the full cycle [9]. The National Education Policy 2020 further positions accreditation as the principal basis of institutional autonomy and graded regulation, thereby raising the stakes attached to every cycle [10].

Existing Indian scholarship has examined NAAC mainly from institutional, structural and

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outcome-oriented perspectives. Studies have addressed implementation challenges and opportunities [1], the comparative performance of quality indicators [2], strategic planning roadmaps [3], outcome-based education [11], the role of NAAC in quality assurance [12], its effectiveness in improving academic excellence [13], its influence on research and innovation [14] and its contribution to student learning outcomes [15]. These contributions are valuable, but they predominantly adopt the institution as the unit of analysis. The teacher, as a worker with finite time, attention and goodwill, appears in them mostly as an implementer of policy rather than as a person whose engagement is itself an outcome worth protecting.

This paper addresses that gap. It does so by treating teacher perception as legitimate scientific evidence, not as anecdote. Perception is the mediating variable through which objective workload becomes either a stimulus for growth or a source of alienation, and it is also the variable that most directly predicts whether capable teachers remain invested in their institutions. The study has four objectives:

1. to map the existing evidence on administrative workload and teacher engagement in the context of accreditation;
2. to synthesise convergent and divergent perceptions across different stakeholder perspectives;
3. to identify the mechanisms through which accreditation workload is believed to shape engagement; and
4. to propose testable propositions and a measurement framework that can guide primary empirical work.

The contribution is intentionally analytical. The paper does not claim to report a new survey. Instead, it applies a transparent, PRISMA-guided procedure to expose what the evidence actually supports, where it is thin, and where policy narratives run ahead of data. This is what is meant here by analytical reality exposure: a disciplined effort to compare the declared purposes of accreditation with the perceived realities of those who implement it.

2. Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

2.1 Accreditation workload as a composite demand

Accreditation workload is not a single quantity. It is a bundle of at least five distinguishable demands. The first is documentation demand, the volume of records, files, reports and evidence that must be produced and maintained. The second is coordination demand, the time spent in committees, cross-departmental reconciliation and communication with the internal quality assurance cell. The third is data demand, the effort of entering, verifying and reconciling quantitative metrics, increasingly across several portals. The fourth is performance demand, the pressure to present, rehearse and defend institutional practice before external peer teams. The fifth is temporal demand, the compression of effort into pre-visit periods that coincide with teaching and examination calendars. The planning literature on NAAC acknowledges that successful cycles depend on careful sequencing and distributed responsibility, which implicitly recognises these demands [3].

Disaggregating workload in this way matters because the demands do not carry equal psychological weight. Documentation that teachers regard as a natural by-product of their practice may be experienced as manageable, whereas documentation produced retrospectively

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for an audit and unrelated to practice is likely to be experienced as burdensome. This distinction between work that is embedded in role purpose and work that is imposed from outside is central to the analysis that follows.

2.2 Job demands–resources and conservation of resources

The job demands–resources model proposes two parallel processes. A health-impairment process links excessive demands to exhaustion, and a motivational process links resources to engagement [7]. A refinement distinguishes challenge demands, which stretch people but offer growth, from hindrance demands, which obstruct goal attainment without offering developmental returns [7]. The question of whether accreditation workload functions as a challenge or a hindrance is an empirical one, and the answer is likely to depend on how well the demand is aligned with the teacher's professional goals.

Conservation of resources theory complements this view by proposing that people strive to obtain, retain and protect valued resources, and that stress arises when resources are threatened, lost or insufficiently replenished by investment [16]. For teachers, time, energy, professional credibility and intellectual freedom are core resources. Accreditation exercises that consume time without returning recognition, learning or institutional improvement may be perceived as resource loss spirals, in which depleted staff become progressively less capable of meeting the next demand.
Karasek's demand–control model adds a further dimension by arguing that strain is greatest when high demands coincide with low decision latitude [17]. Applied to accreditation, the model predicts that the same volume of work will be experienced very differently depending on whether teachers have a voice in how evidence is gathered, how roles are assigned and how results are interpreted.

2.3 Audit culture, performativity and ceremonial compliance

A complementary body of critical scholarship explains why accreditation may fail to deliver its promise even when conducted conscientiously. Strathern observed that audit tends to change what it measures, because the measure becomes the target [18]. Power described the audit society as one in which rituals of verification may take priority over substantive improvement, producing comfort for regulators rather than learning for institutions [19]. Ball argued that regimes of performativity reshape teachers' professional identities, so that value is attached to what can be displayed and counted rather than to what is educationally significant [20]. Meyer and Rowan's institutional theory supplies the structural counterpart: organisations adopt formal structures that signal legitimacy to the environment, and they may decouple these structures from everyday practice [21].

These perspectives lead to a distinctive prediction. Where accreditation is perceived as ceremonial, teachers are likely to experience the associated workload as meaningless, and meaninglessness is a particularly strong predictor of disengagement. Where it is perceived as developmental, the same workload may be tolerated or even valued.

2.4 Street-level implementation

Lipsky's account of street-level bureaucracy is helpful for understanding the position of teachers within accreditation. Frontline workers translate policy into practice under conditions

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of limited resources and ambiguous goals, and they develop coping routines such as rationing time, simplifying tasks and prioritising what is monitored [22]. Teachers participating in accreditation are, in effect, street-level implementers. Their perceptions therefore provide privileged information about the gap between policy design and operational reality, which is why a perception-based approach is methodologically defensible and not merely subjective.

2.5 Integrated conceptual model

Integrating these strands, the study adopts a mediated model. Accreditation-related administrative workload, comprising documentation, coordination, data, performance and temporal demands, is expected to influence teacher engagement through perceived workload, perceived meaningfulness and perceived fairness. The relationship is moderated by autonomy, leadership support, role clarity, recognition and workload-allocation transparency. Engagement, in turn, is expected to be associated with intention to remain, teaching quality, scholarly productivity and, paradoxically, the long-run quality of the accreditation outcome itself. This final loop is the crux of the argument: an accreditation process that depletes engagement may undermine the very improvement it seeks to certify.

3. Methods

3.1 Design and reporting standard

The study is a structured scoping synthesis with a narrative, thematic analytic strategy. The Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) 2020 statement was used as the reporting backbone for identification, screening, eligibility and inclusion [23], and the PRISMA extension for scoping reviews (PRISMA-ScR) guided the decision to map and characterise evidence instead of pooling effect sizes [24]. A scoping design was appropriate for three reasons. First, the evidence on accreditation workload in India is heterogeneous in design, ranging from conceptual analyses and case studies to institutional comparisons. Second, very few studies report standardised engagement or workload measures that could be meta-analysed. Third, the purpose was to expose gaps between policy narratives and perceived reality, which is a mapping question before it is an effect-estimation question. The rationale for transparent scoping procedures in social science and education research has been articulated in recent methodological guidance, which also informed the present protocol [25,26].

3.2 Review question

Using the Population–Concept–Context logic recommended for scoping work [24], the review question was: *What does the available evidence indicate about how administrative workload generated by NAAC accreditation is perceived by teachers, and how is it related to their engagement, compared with the perceptions of other stakeholders?* The population was teachers and academic staff in higher education institutions; the concept was administrative workload and engagement; and the context was accreditation and quality assurance, with primary emphasis on NAAC in India.

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3.3 Information sources

Two classes of sources were used. The first was a curated corpus of 117 bibliographic records supplied for this study (hereafter, the supplied corpus). It spans education, public health, sociology, law and yoga studies and therefore requires careful screening for relevance. Priority was given to records published in 2023 and 2024, in accordance with the study protocol. The second class comprised purposively selected external sources: foundational theoretical works on engagement, burnout and job stress; critical scholarship on audit and quality assurance; empirical studies of academic workload and quality-assurance perception; and policy and news sources describing current developments in Indian accreditation. External sources were selected to triangulate the supplied corpus and to provide comparative perspectives from other systems. They were not obtained through an exhaustive database search, and this limitation is acknowledged explicitly in Section 7.

3.4 Eligibility criteria

Records were eligible for the core evidence set if they (a) were published in 2023 or 2024; (b) addressed NAAC, accreditation or quality assurance in Indian higher education; and (c) offered empirical, comparative, case-based or critical-analytic content relevant to institutional implementation, teacher roles or outcomes. Records were eligible as methodological support if they addressed research ethics or scholarly integrity, because these bear directly on the credibility of perception research [27,28]. Records outside higher education quality assurance, such as those on yoga, floods, law, geopolitics or clinical medicine, were excluded at title screening. External sources were eligible if they contributed theory, comparative empirical evidence on academic workload or engagement, or documented policy context.

3.5 Selection process and data charting

Screening was conducted at title and bibliographic-scope level against the criteria above. For each included record, the following were charted: year, type of contribution, principal focus, stakeholder perspective represented, and relevance to workload and engagement. Because the core records are largely conceptual, comparative and case-based rather than controlled studies, no quantitative effect-size extraction was attempted, and no formal risk-of-bias instrument for experimental designs was applied. Instead, each record was appraised qualitatively for the transparency of its stated aims, the clarity of its analytical frame and the extent to which it addressed the teacher as an actor.

3.6 Synthesis approach

A thematic synthesis was undertaken, following the six-phase logic of reflexive thematic analysis: familiarisation, coding, theme generation, theme review, definition and reporting [29]. Codes were derived both inductively from the included material and deductively from the conceptual framework in Section 2. Themes were then compared across four vantage points, namely teachers, institutional administrators, the accrediting body and students, to expose divergences in perception. The comparative step is central to the analytical-reality objective, since divergence between vantage points is itself a finding.

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3.7 Ethical considerations and research integrity

No human participants were recruited and no personal data were collected. All sources are published or publicly reported. Ethical practice in social science research requires transparency about the limits of evidence, respect for sources and the avoidance of misrepresentation [27]. The manuscript was composed through original synthesis, paraphrasing with attribution and systematic citation, in line with established guidance on preventing plagiarism and on verifying originality through detection tools [28]. Characterisations of included records are confined to their stated scope and focus; no findings are attributed to a source that the source does not support.

4. Results

4.1 Study selection

The supplied corpus contained 117 records. Two were excluded at the outset because they lacked a usable publication date or were unattributed fragments. Of the remaining records, 18 were published in 2023 (six records) or 2024 (twelve records). Title-level screening of these 18 showed that eight addressed NAAC or accreditation-based quality assurance directly: three published in 2023 [3,14,15] and five in 2024 [1,2,11-13]. A further two 2024 records, on research ethics and plagiarism detection, were retained as methodological support [27,28]. The remaining eight records from 2023 and 2024 concerned language and culture, Indian foreign relations, Gandhian thought, environmental conservation and hospital-acquired infection, and were excluded as outside the review question. Records from 2025 onward were not treated as core evidence, because the protocol prioritised 2023–2024 publications, although two 2025 methodological papers on PRISMA-ScR were consulted for reporting guidance [25,26].

In summary, the PRISMA-style flow for the supplied corpus was as follows: records identified, n = 117; records with usable dates, n = 115; records within the 2023–2024 window, n = 18; records excluded as outside topic, n = 8; records assessed for eligibility, n = 10; records included as core evidence, n = 8; records included as methodological support, n = 2. Alongside these, 28 external sources were included as theoretical, comparative and contextual evidence. Because the external sources were purposively rather than exhaustively selected, they are not placed within the flow counts.

4.2 Characteristics of the core evidence

Table 1 summarises the eight core records. All eight are single-author analyses of NAAC-related quality assurance in Indian higher education, which is a notable structural feature of the evidence base. The records cover the full accreditation arc, from preparation and strategic planning [3], through indicator-level performance [2] and implementation [1], to outcomes in terms of academic excellence [13], research and innovation [14], learning outcomes [15], outcome-based education [11] and overall quality-assurance impact [12]. Their descriptions below reflect each record’s stated scope; they are not claims about quantitative effect sizes.

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Table 1. Core evidence set: NAAC and quality-assurance records published in 2023–2024 and their relevance to teacher workload and engagement

Ref.	Year	Stated focus	Contribution type	Principal perspective	Relevance to workload and engagement (analytical reading)
[3]	2023	Strategic planning roadmap for achieving accreditation	Planning framework	Institutional leadership	Implies distributed task allocation; sequencing and role clarity are preconditions for manageable workload
[14]	2023	NAAC and research and innovation across universities	Comparative analysis	Institutional / research	Raises the question of whether documentation labour competes with research time
[15]	2023	Student learning outcomes and the assessment process	Case study of colleges	Institutional / student outcomes	Links accreditation to teaching quality; outcome evidence imposes assessment documentation on teachers
[1]	2024	Implementation challenges and opportunities	Empirical study	Implementers	Directly concerned with operational difficulty; most proximal to teacher experience
[2]	2024	Quality indicators, best practices and challenges	Comparative analysis	Institutional / indicator-level	Indicator density is a structural driver of data and documentation demand
[11]	2024	Outcome-based education and strategic implications	Case study	Institutional / curricular	Outcome mapping creates recurrent teacher-level record-keeping obligations
[12]	2024	NAAC's role and impact in quality assurance	Critical analysis	Policy / institutional	Evaluates whether the process achieves its assurance purpose, which is the precondition for meaningful workload
[13]	2024	Effectiveness in improving academic excellence	Effectiveness analysis	Institutional outcomes	Tests the proposition that accreditation effort translates into improvement

Two observations follow from the table. First, the perspective column is dominated by institutional and policy vantage points. Direct teacher voice, in the sense of standardised measurement of how teachers experience workload and engagement, is the least represented element. Second, the records collectively treat implementation difficulty as an object of study

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[1], which provides a legitimate entry point for examining workload but does not yet isolate it as a variable.

4.3 Thematic synthesis

Four themes were generated. Each draws on the core records, the external theoretical and empirical sources, and the comparison between them.

Theme 1: Documentation intensity displaces pedagogic and scholarly time

The most consistent pattern across sources is that accreditation expands the volume of recordable activity. Indicator-based frameworks, by design, convert practice into evidence, and the greater the number of indicators, the greater the number of artefacts that must be produced, verified and archived [2]. Implementation-focused analysis identifies operational challenges as a central feature of the Indian experience of NAAC reform [1], and outcome-based approaches add recurrent mapping, assessment and reporting duties to the working lives of teachers [11].

External evidence supports the displacement mechanism. A teacher-perspective survey of accreditation in Indian education reports that it examined time allocation, mental and physical wellbeing and time management among faculty, and frames its inquiry around the gap between the expected and actual impact of accreditation, concluding that proactive measures are needed to support faculty [30]. Wider scholarship on academic work reports that staff in managerial universities experience fragmentation of time, with administrative tasks intruding on the uninterrupted periods needed for scholarship and preparation [8]. Studies of academic workload models likewise find that staff often perceive formal allocation systems as failing to capture the true range of tasks they perform, so that administrative effort remains partly invisible [31].
The implication is that workload is not only a matter of hours. It is a matter of which activities are displaced. Where research and innovation are themselves accreditation criteria [14], there is a structural irony: the documentation of research can consume the time required to conduct it. Likewise, where student learning outcomes are a focal criterion [15], the labour of proving learning may reduce the time available to promote it.

Theme 2: Compliance is frequently ceremonial rather than developmental

A second theme concerns the purpose that teachers attribute to the process. The critical literature on quality assurance consistently reports that academics distinguish between quality assurance as a means of improving teaching and quality assurance as a managerial control device. Newton's study of academics' perceptions described staff who saw quality monitoring as feeding a bureaucratic apparatus without commensurate benefit to teaching [32]. Cardoso and colleagues, examining why academics think quality is not achieved in higher education, reported that staff attributed shortfalls to bureaucratic implementation, limited involvement in design and the privileging of procedure over substance [33].

Within the Indian corpus, the effectiveness question is posed explicitly. Analyses of NAAC's role and impact [12] and of its effectiveness in improving academic excellence [13] reflect the recognition that accreditation must be judged by whether it improves outcomes and not merely by whether it is completed. This is exactly the criterion that teachers apply when deciding whether workload is meaningful. If the process is perceived to produce certification without

improvement, the associated labour is likely to be classified as a hindrance demand [7].
Institutional theory offers a structural explanation. Organisations seeking legitimacy may adopt visible formal structures that are only loosely coupled to daily practice [21], and audit scholarship warns that rituals of verification can displace substantive improvement [19]. Strathern's formulation, that measures turn into targets and cease to be good measures, captures the risk that teachers will optimise for documentation rather than for education [18]. Ball's analysis of performativity adds that the cost is not only time but also professional identity, as teachers are pressed to see themselves through the metrics that are applied to them [20].
A recent and serious illustration of the integrity risks surrounding ceremonial compliance is the February 2025 arrest of members of a NAAC inspection committee in a bribery case investigated by India's Central Bureau of Investigation, which involved allegations that inspection outcomes could be influenced by payment [34]. Allegations are not findings, and no conclusion about guilt is drawn here. The case is nevertheless analytically relevant, because it demonstrates why teachers who observe or suspect the commodification of accreditation outcomes may withdraw their moral investment from the exercise. The reform agenda that followed, including plans for artificial-intelligence tools to flag suspicious data and a single annual data submission, is a policy acknowledgement that data integrity and duplication are real concerns [9].

Theme 3: Workload is unevenly distributed and poorly recognised

The third theme concerns fairness. Accreditation tasks are rarely distributed on the basis of transparent, formally recognised criteria. Comparative studies of workload systems in higher education report that perceived inequity and opacity in allocation are among the strongest sources of dissatisfaction [31]. Across countries, academics' job stress and satisfaction are shaped not only by the amount of work but by institutional conditions, including the extent to which administrative duties are balanced against recognised academic outputs [35]. UK-based research on academic wellbeing has linked high workloads, pressure and weak work–life boundaries to impaired wellbeing, and has highlighted the cumulative effect of doing more with fewer resources [36].

In the accreditation context, three distributional patterns are plausible and consistent with the sources. Junior and early-career teachers may receive a disproportionate share of data-entry and file-preparation tasks because they have less power to refuse. Teachers with strong organisational reputations may be repeatedly selected for committee roles, producing concentrated overload. Teachers in smaller departments or under-resourced colleges may face the same indicator burden with fewer hands. These patterns are hypotheses derived from the structure of the evidence; the core Indian records do not report them quantitatively [1,2], which is a gap rather than a finding.
Recognition is the companion issue. Where accreditation labour is not counted within formal workload, it becomes what the workload-model literature describes as hidden work [31]. Under conservation of resources logic, unrecognised effort is a resource loss without compensating gain [16], and under the demand–control model it is especially harmful when assigned without discretion over how it is performed [17].

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Theme 4: Engagement depends on autonomy, fairness and meaning more than on volume

The fourth theme is the most analytically important, because it qualifies a simplistic claim that more workload leads to lower engagement. The engagement literature indicates that engagement is sustained by resources and weakened by hindrance demands [7]. Burnout research similarly locates the sources of exhaustion not only in workload but in mismatches between the person and the job along six domains: workload, control, reward, community, fairness and values [37]. A workload that is high but accompanied by control, recognition, collegial support and alignment with values may be experienced as a challenge. A workload that is moderate but arbitrary, unrewarded and value-incongruent may be experienced as intolerable.

Teacher-specific research corroborates this. Work on teachers' engagement has produced validated measures capturing cognitive, emotional, social and behavioural dimensions across cultures [38], and studies of the teaching profession report that emotional exhaustion and a weak sense of belonging are linked to lower job satisfaction and a stronger desire to leave [39]. These findings suggest that the pertinent question for accreditation is not only "how much?" but "under what conditions?".

This theme also helps interpret the ambition of the Indian reforms. The movement toward binary accreditation, maturity-based graded levels and a single data submission can be read as an attempt to reduce duplication, which is a major hindrance demand [9]. If implemented as announced, it may lower repetitive data work; whether it does so depends on how faithfully institutions translate national simplification into internal practice. Internal translation is the step at which teachers' experience is largely determined.

The emerging literature on withdrawal from work offers a cautionary note. Analyses of quiet quitting characterise it as a form of resistance that arises when effort is perceived as unrewarded and meaningless, with disengagement acting as a protective response to alienation [40]. In accreditation, the analogous behaviour would be minimal compliance: completing required documentation at the lowest acceptable standard while withdrawing discretionary effort from mentoring, innovation and collegial leadership. The most damaging consequence is therefore not visible refusal but silent disengagement.

4.4 Comparative perspectives

To expose divergences, the evidence was organised by stakeholder vantage point. Table 2 presents the comparative matrix. Its entries are analytical syntheses of the sources cited in each cell, intended to show where perceptions converge and where they diverge. They are not survey percentages.

Table 2. Comparative matrix of stakeholder perceptions of accreditation workload and engagement

Dimension	Teachers (implementers)	Institutional administrators	Accrediting body / policy	Students	Divergence exposed
Purpose of accreditation	Often perceived as compliance-driven;	Strategic positioning, reputation, eligibility for	Quality enhancement, transparency, benchmarking	Expected improvements in learning	Declared purpose (enhancement) versus perceived

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	benefit to teaching questioned [30,32,33]	autonomy [3,10]	[9,12]	and facilities [15]	purpose (certification)
Volume and nature of work	Documentation and data demands displace teaching and research time [8,31]	Managed through committees and planning roadmaps [3]	Indicator-based frameworks designed for comprehensiveness [2]; moving to reduce duplication [9]	Not documented in the core records	Comprehensiveness of design versus capacity of implementers
Distribution and recognition	Uneven; often invisible in formal workload [31,35,36]	Task allocation by availability and seniority (plausible; not quantified in the core records)	Not specified at the individual level	Not applicable	Absence of a transparent allocation standard
Effect on engagement	Fatigue, withdrawal and minimal compliance where meaning is low [37,39,40]	Assumes motivation can be mobilised through incentives and leadership [3]	Assumes engagement is secondary to outcomes	Indirect: teacher energy shapes teaching quality	Engagement treated as a means, not as an outcome
Integrity and trust	Concerns where outcomes appear influenced or tokenistic [19,34]	Pressure to demonstrate grades	Strengthening data integrity, AI-based flagging [9]	Trust in published grades	Trust gap between public grade and internal reality
Outcome measurement	Doubts that metrics capture educational value [18,20]	Evidence-based tracking of improvement [13]	Outcome-based and maturity-based assessment [9,11]	Learning outcomes [15]	Measure versus meaning

Three divergences are especially instructive. The first concerns purpose: administrators and the accrediting body describe enhancement, while teachers' perceptions in the comparative literature lean towards compliance [30,32,33]. The second concerns the status of engagement: institutional documents treat engagement as an enabling condition for outcomes, whereas the engagement literature treats it as an outcome in its own right and a predictor of retention and

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performance [5,7,38]. The third concerns recognition: teacher accounts emphasise invisibility of effort [31], while institutional planning emphasises task completion [3]. The common thread is that the system optimises what is observable at the institutional level and under-observes what is experienced at the individual level.

4.5 Comparative evidence from other national systems

Placing the Indian discussion beside international evidence clarifies which features are context-specific and which are structural. In the United Kingdom, studies of academic wellbeing and of quality monitoring describe a recurrent pattern in which accountability requirements expand faster than the resources provided to meet them [32,36]. In Portugal, academics interviewed about the failure of quality to be achieved placed responsibility on bureaucratic implementation and limited participation, not on the principle of quality assurance itself [33]. A multi-country comparison of academics' job satisfaction and stress concluded that conditions at institutional level shape stress outcomes in addition to individual characteristics [35]. Teacher-level research in schools reports the same relationship between emotional exhaustion, belonging and intention to leave in a different sector [39].

The comparative reading yields two cautious inferences. First, the core mechanism, in which audit-type demands outstrip professional discretion, appears across systems and is therefore unlikely to be an artefact of Indian administrative culture. Second, the Indian context differs in the speed of reform, the scale of institutions still entering the system [9], and the dependence of institutional status on accreditation outcomes [10]. These features may intensify the experience of workload in India, although the comparative evidence cannot establish that they do.

5. Discussion

5.1 What the evidence supports, and what it does not

The central finding of this synthesis is that the relationship between accreditation workload and teacher engagement is conditional. The sources do not support the blunt claim that accreditation inevitably exhausts teachers, and they equally fail to support the reassuring claim that accreditation uniformly enhances institutional quality at acceptable cost to staff. What they support is a contingent model in which the same volume of administrative labour can be energising, neutral or corrosive depending on whether it is perceived as meaningful, fair and controllable [7,17,37].

This conclusion should be stated with appropriate restraint. The eight core records examine accreditation chiefly from institutional vantage points and, in their stated scope, do not measure teacher engagement with validated instruments [1-3,11-15]. The inference that workload erodes engagement under certain conditions therefore rests on the triangulation of institutional analyses with the external theoretical and empirical literature, not on direct measurement within the Indian accreditation setting. That distinction is precisely what an analytically honest paper must expose. Much public discussion of accreditation fatigue is grounded in plausible narrative; the evidence that would convert plausibility into demonstration has yet to be systematically collected.

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5.2 The policy ideal versus the perceived reality

The analytical-reality theme can be stated as a three-part gap. The first gap lies between the ideal of enhancement and the perceived reality of certification. The Indian literature frames NAAC as a mechanism for strengthening quality, and its more recent analyses ask whether it does so in practice [12,13]. The comparative quality-assurance literature, however, shows that academics in several systems have long suspected that assurance regimes serve managerial and regulatory interests more than educational ones [32,33]. If Indian teachers share that perception, then the legitimacy of the entire process is at stake, whatever its formal design.

The second gap lies between comprehensiveness and capacity. Indicator-based frameworks aim to cover curriculum, teaching–learning, research, infrastructure, student support, governance and best practice. Comprehensiveness is defensible in principle, yet it implies a high documentation burden in practice [2]. The institutions best equipped to bear that burden are those with dedicated quality cells, administrative staff and digital systems. Smaller and rural colleges, where the same few teachers handle teaching, administration and accreditation, are more exposed. The national figures reported by the accrediting authority, indicating that a minority of colleges are accredited or participating, suggest that the full diffusion of the accreditation burden is still ahead [9]. The workload question will therefore grow in importance as coverage expands.

The third gap lies between measured outcomes and meaningful outcomes. Outcome-based approaches are intended to shift attention from inputs to results [11], and the connection between accreditation and learning outcomes is a legitimate area of enquiry [15]. Yet the audit literature warns that metrics can be gamed, that measured things become targets, and that teachers may be pressed to display rather than to educate [18-20]. The perceived reality may thus be that teachers are asked to prove outcomes in formats that do not capture the outcomes they value most.

5.3 Mechanisms linking workload to engagement

Four mechanisms can be distinguished, each consistent with the theoretical framework and the sources reviewed.

The first is time displacement. Accreditation work competes with teaching preparation, feedback, mentoring and research. Because these activities are the principal sources of intrinsic satisfaction for most teachers, their displacement removes the very resources that sustain engagement [7,8]. The second is control erosion. When tasks are assigned top-down, with fixed templates and short deadlines, decision latitude is low, which is the condition under which high demand produces the greatest strain [17]. The third is meaning loss. Where the process is perceived as ceremonial, teachers may experience a values mismatch, which burnout research identifies as a core driver of exhaustion and cynicism [21,37]. The fourth is recognition deficit. Unrecognised labour constitutes a resource loss that is not compensated by status, reward or career advantage [16,31].

These mechanisms are not independent. They reinforce one another through a spiral dynamic. Depleted teachers have less capacity to cope with the next demand, are less likely to volunteer for discretionary roles, and are more likely to adopt minimal compliance routines [16,22]. Minimal compliance in turn weakens the quality of evidence and the sincerity of reflection, which increases the likelihood that the next cycle will be even more burdensome. The street-

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level perspective helps to explain why such coping routines arise: when resources are scarce and goals ambiguous, frontline workers ration effort and prioritise what is monitored [22].

5.4 Heterogeneity and the question of fairness

A more careful reading is needed to avoid treating teachers as a homogeneous group. The comparative workload literature indicates that perceptions of fairness are decisive, and that transparency in allocation can attenuate the negative effects of high workload [31,35]. Several moderating variables are therefore likely to matter. Rank and tenure influence both the likelihood of being assigned accreditation tasks and the capacity to decline them. Discipline matters because science and technology departments may have more standardised records than humanities departments. Institutional type matters because autonomous colleges, affiliated colleges and universities differ in their administrative support. Gender may also matter, since service and care-oriented tasks are often distributed unevenly; this possibility is raised here as a research question and is not asserted as an established finding.

Fairness also has a procedural dimension. Teachers who are consulted about how evidence is to be gathered, who see their contributions acknowledged in reports, and who receive feedback on results are more likely to perceive the work as shared rather than imposed. This is consistent with the engagement literature, which identifies feedback, participation and support as key job resources [7,38].

5.5 Reconciling workload with the legitimate purposes of accreditation

A critical analysis should not conclude that accreditation is unnecessary. The case for external quality assurance is strong, particularly in a system of the size and diversity of Indian higher education, where public information about institutional quality is limited. The legitimate purposes of accreditation, namely transparency, comparability and a driver of improvement, can be pursued without imposing the full cost on the teaching workforce. The reform trajectory toward binary accreditation, maturity-based graded levels and data consolidation represents a potentially significant reduction in duplication, if implemented with fidelity [9]. National policy also gives accreditation a central position in the promotion of institutional autonomy and quality, which makes it all the more important that the process earns the trust of those who carry it out [10].

The decisive question for implementation is whether reform at the national level is translated into simplified practice at the institutional level. If a streamlined national framework is overlaid by additional institutional templates, parallel internal audits and ceremonial mock inspections, the benefit to teachers will be negated. The evidence on implementation challenges suggests that the translation step is where reform most often falters [1], which is consistent with the street-level view that policy is ultimately made at the point of delivery [22].

5.6 Integrity and trust as engagement conditions

The documented integrity concerns surrounding accreditation raise a specific engagement risk. When teachers believe that outcomes can be influenced by factors other than genuine quality, they may infer that sincere effort is futile [34]. Institutional theory predicts that ceremonial adoption increases when legitimacy matters more than substance [21], and audit scholarship warns that distrust accompanies ritualised verification [19]. The announced intention to use

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data analytics to detect anomalous submissions and to reduce redundant reporting may help rebuild trust, but trust is slow to rebuild and quick to erode [9]. Transparency about how grades are determined, and about the safeguards against improper influence, is therefore a condition of teacher engagement as well as of public credibility.

6. Implications, Propositions and Measurement Framework

6.1 Implications for institutions

Several practical implications follow from the synthesis, each framed as a hypothesis-informed recommendation instead of a proven remedy.

Institutions should make accreditation labour visible by incorporating it in formal workload allocation, with credit comparable to teaching and research hours. The workload-model evidence suggests that invisible work is a persistent source of grievance [31]. They should adopt continuous rather than episodic evidence collection, embedding documentation in routine academic processes so that preparation for a cycle does not require an intensive, retrospective sprint. The planning literature on NAAC supports advance sequencing and distributed responsibility as features of successful cycles [3]. They should invest in professional administrative support and digital systems so that data entry does not default to teaching staff. They should protect time, for example by scheduling intensive accreditation tasks outside examination and peak teaching periods. They should involve teachers in designing evidence processes, which increases autonomy and meaning [17]. And they should distinguish clearly between internal improvement activities and external compliance activities, so that teachers can see what the work is for.

6.2 Implications for the accrediting body and policy makers

For the accrediting authority, the primary implication is to evaluate the burden of the process, and not only the performance of institutions. Periodic, publicly reported estimates of staff hours per cycle, disaggregated by institution type, would provide the missing evidence on workload. Data consolidation, if realised, should be accompanied by a clear commitment that duplicate requests across agencies will cease [9]. Indicator rationalisation should be informed by the question of whether each indicator adds information that justifies its documentation cost [2]. The principle of proportionality, long advocated in regulatory theory, suggests that smaller and under-resourced institutions should not face a proportionally larger burden than well-resourced ones [22].

6.3 Testable propositions

To transform the analytical findings into a research programme, five propositions are advanced. Each is stated so that it can be tested with primary data.

P1 (Conditional effect). The association between accreditation workload and teacher engagement is moderated by perceived autonomy, such that high workload is associated with lower engagement only when autonomy is low [7,17].
P2 (Meaning mediation). Perceived meaningfulness of the accreditation process mediates the relationship between workload and engagement, such that workload perceived as ceremonial is more strongly associated with disengagement than workload perceived as developmental

[21,32,33].

P3 (Fairness effect). Perceived fairness of task allocation is independently associated with engagement, over and above total hours worked [31,35,37].

P4 (Recognition buffer). Formal recognition of accreditation labour within workload allocation attenuates the association between workload and exhaustion [16,31].

P5 (Quality feedback loop). Higher teacher engagement during accreditation preparation is associated with higher perceived quality of evidence and reflection, which in turn is associated with higher perceived post-accreditation improvement [13,15,38].

6.4 Proposed measurement framework

A primary perception study would benefit from a design that combines validated instruments with context-specific items. Work engagement can be measured with the short Utrecht Work Engagement Scale, which captures vigour, dedication and absorption and has been validated across national samples [41]. Teacher engagement can be complemented by a multidimensional instrument that has been validated across several countries and that captures cognitive, emotional, social and behavioural dimensions [38]. Burnout and exhaustion can be assessed through established burnout measures grounded in the six areas of work-life framework [37]. Accreditation-specific items should capture hours spent on each of the five workload components identified in Section 2.1, perceived duplication, perceived clarity of requirements, perceived fairness of allocation, perceived recognition, and perceived purpose of the process (enhancement versus compliance). Sampling should be stratified by institution type, discipline, rank and gender, and analysis should employ moderated-mediation models consistent with the conceptual model in Section 2.5. Mixed methods designs are recommended, because qualitative interviews can reveal the mechanisms behind statistical associations and can detect forms of silent disengagement that surveys may miss [29,40]. Ethical safeguards should include anonymity, voluntary participation and protection against institutional retaliation, since respondents may fear that critical responses will identify them [27].

7. Limitations

This synthesis has several limitations that should temper its conclusions. First, the supplied corpus is a curated set of records and not the product of an exhaustive, multi-database search, and the external sources were purposively selected. The PRISMA-style counts reported in Section 4.1 describe the supplied corpus only and should not be interpreted as a comprehensive account of all literature on the topic [23,24]. Second, the core Indian records are single-author analyses of institutional implementation, and their characterisation here is confined to their stated scope and focus; the synthesis did not extract quantitative effect sizes and cannot make claims about the magnitude of any relationship. Third, the heavy representation of one author across the core evidence introduces a risk of perspective concentration and of self-referential reasoning, which is partly mitigated by triangulation with independent external sources. Fourth, much of the external empirical evidence derives from non-Indian systems, so transfer to the Indian context should be treated as plausible but unproven. Fifth, no primary perception data were collected, so the title's reference to perception is addressed through the analysis of published perceptions and not through a new survey; this is why the paper offers propositions in place of tested hypotheses. Sixth, accreditation policy is changing quickly, and statements

about reforms reflect reported plans and announcements that may be revised in implementation [9].

8. Conclusion

This paper set out to expose the relationship between administrative workload and teacher engagement during NAAC accreditation by applying a transparent, PRISMA-guided synthesis to a focused body of recent Indian scholarship and a purposively selected set of external theoretical and empirical sources. The analysis leads to four conclusions.

First, accreditation generates a multi-component workload that is concentrated on teachers and that competes directly with teaching and scholarship, a pattern consistent with the structure of indicator-based frameworks and with wider evidence on managerial universities [2,8]. Second, perceptions of that workload are strongly shaped by perceived purpose: teachers are more likely to experience the labour as burdensome when they regard the process as ceremonial than when they regard it as developmental [19,21,32,33]. Third, engagement depends on autonomy, fairness, recognition and meaning, so that the same workload can be tolerable in one institution and corrosive in another [7,17,37]. Fourth, there is a pronounced evidence gap: direct, validated measurement of teacher engagement within NAAC accreditation is largely absent from the current literature, and institutional perspectives dominate [1,12,13].

The practical message is neither anti-accreditation nor uncritical. External quality assurance remains valuable, and the national reform trajectory towards simplification is welcome [9,10]. But the legitimacy and effectiveness of accreditation ultimately depend on the people who carry it out. A system that depletes the engagement of its teachers in order to certify the quality of their teaching defeats its own purpose. Accreditation bodies and institutions should therefore treat teacher engagement as an outcome to be monitored and protected, and not as a free resource to be drawn upon. The propositions and measurement framework offered here provide a route to the primary evidence that would allow that principle to be tested and, where the data warrant, acted upon.

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