

A Comparative Analysis of NIRF Ranking, NAAC Accreditation and NBA Accreditation

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REVIEW ARTICLE

ABSTRACT: In the context of education, Accreditation and Ranking are measures of overall quality of an educational Programme and Institution. Both are assessments of the totality of various quality parameters of education including the input quality and quantity, innovative process and performance, continuous improvement, institutional support, governance and output quality in terms of students' performance, graduate outcomes, inclusivity, perception, etc. Since Accreditation and Ranking are measures of the overall performance and total quality of an educational programme or institution, the scores obtained for all criteria/metrics/parameters are cumulated to compute the total marks, grade or rank as the case may be. Nevertheless, there is a discernible difference between Accreditation and Ranking in terms of the specific criteria or metrics used, weightages assigned, assessment methodology employed, and description of the outcome. Accreditation and Ranking are described by three important measures namely NBA accreditation, NAAC accreditation and NIRF ranking. NBA accreditation is a measure of the degree of excellence of a Programme, whereas NAAC accreditation and NIRF ranking are measures of the degree of excellence of an Institution. All the three measures are unique and not competitors to each other but together they provide multiple benefits to the Institutions. Hence, it is desirable that all Tier I, Tier II and other institutions aspire to achieve all the three distinct measures, step by step sequentially, in order to continuously improve the quality for achieving fame and recognition at national level.

KEYWORDS: Comparative analysis, NIRF ranking, NAAC accreditation, NBA accreditation

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1. INTRODUCTION

The National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF) in India has published the ranking of universities/institutions in various categories for the fifth time in series, on 11th June 2020. As usual the ranking list is topped by IISc, IITs, IIMs, and NITs in various categories. Since its announcement there has been a lot of anxiety, discussion, opinions amongst various stakeholders; few are thinking that some institutions which have accreditation by National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) and accreditation of programmes by National Board of Accreditation (NBA) do not find their names in the NIRF ranking list, so is there any need for ranking when there is an accreditation? Which is easier to accomplish, i.e. whether securing NIRF ranking is difficult as compared to achieving NAAC accreditation or NBA accreditation? Is obtaining NBA accreditation for few Programmes easier than attaining NAAC accreditation for the entire Institution or vice-versa? There was news by the Vice-Chancellor of Anna University that the university fell by five ranks this time due to loss of around 400 students, who left to

join medicine after a delay in medical counseling held last year. Few Institutions who figured in the NIRF ranking list last year failed to find their names in the list this year. Only few Institutions have improved their ranking this year while many went down in their positions. Some others write that there is a flaw in the NIRF methodology and indicate how to fix it and so on. The author who is actively involved in the field of engineering education for last two decades, has critically analyzed the NIRF methodology vis-à-vis NAAC and NBA methodologies, compared the criteria, weightages, reporting, benefits, and present here a comprehensive view of findings and recommendations.

2. Accreditation versus Ranking

In the context of education, Accreditation and Ranking are not simple measures of quality just as a ratio of output to input, but they are measurements of the degree of excellence exhibited at different levels of education. Hence, they are assessments of the totality of various quality parameters of education including the input quality and quantity, innovative process and performance, continuous improvement, institutional

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support, governance and output quality in terms of students' performance, graduate outcomes, perception, etc. Since Accreditation and Ranking are measures of the overall performance and total quality of an educational institution, the scores obtained for all criteria/parameters are cumulated to compute the total marks, grade or rank. However, Accreditation and Ranking are not exactly the same since there is a discernible difference between the two measures in terms of the specific criteria or metrics used, weightages assigned, assessment methodology employed, and description of the outcome. The basic understanding of both aspects and the pertinent differences between them are highlighted below:

- Accreditation is a process of quality assurance and improvement, whereby a Programme or an Institution is assessed to verify whether the Programme or the Institution continues to meet and/or exceed the Norms and Standards prescribed by AICTE/UGC from time to time or not? It is a kind of recognition which indicates that a Programme or Institution fulfils certain minimum standards and produces graduates to cater to the needs of the industry and/or society.
- Ranking, on the other hand is an assessment of overall performance of an Institution and its comparison with the performance of other Institutions.
- Accreditation by NBA is an assessment of the quality of a Programme based upon the 3-year comprehensive data and improvement to fulfill the POs and PSOs.
- Accreditation by NAAC is an assessment of the quality of an Institution as a whole based upon the 5-year comprehensive data and accomplishments.
- Ranking by NIRF is an assessment of the overall performance of the Institution including its perception as a whole on yearly basis at national level.
- Accreditation by NBA awards absolute marks out of 1000 to the Programme and Accreditation by NAAC awards absolute grade on a 4-point scale to an Institution, whereas ranking by NIRF gives a score out of 100 to an Institution, which is relative to those of other institutions similarly placed and thus brings out a comparison.
- Accreditation by NBA is a measure of the attainment of the set minimum standards by a Programme.
- Accreditation by NAAC is a measure of the continuous fulfillment of the set minimum standards by an Institution.

- Ranking by NIRF is a measure of relative performance of Institutions at national level, arranged from top to bottom (1 to 100 or 200) in a particular category.
- NBA assesses the capability of a Programme to score ≥ 600 marks to secure accreditation for 3-years or to score ≥ 750 marks to secure accreditation for 6-years, based upon the extent of fulfillment of 10 Criteria.
- NAAC assesses the capability of an Institution to score CGPA on a 4-point scale: (a) 3.51 to 4.0 to secure A++ grade; (b) 3.26 to 3.50 to secure A+ grade; (c) 3.01 to 3.25 to secure A grade; (d) 2.76 to 3.00 to secure B++ grade; (e) 2.51 to 2.75 to secure B+ grade; (f) 2.01 to 2.50 to secure B grade; (g) 1.51-2.00 to secure C grade based upon the fulfillment of 7 Criteria for accreditation.
- NIRF assess and ranks one Institution vis-à-vis other Institutions at national level in a particular category.
- NBA Accreditation is valid for a period of 3-years or 6-years and NAAC accreditation is valid for a period of 5-years but NIRF ranking is valid for one year only.
- NBA accreditation is a measure of the degree of excellence of a Programme, whereas NAAC accreditation and NIRF ranking are measures of the degree of excellence of an Institution.

3. Criteria, Parameters (Metrics) and Weightages

NIRF, NAAC and NBA use extensive criteria and metrics to assess the overall educational quality but with varying criteria, methodology and weightages as described below.

3.1 NIRF Ranking Parameters and Weightage (Engineering)

The five important parameters (metrics) used in NIRF ranking and their weightages are given in Table 1. The weightages for these five parameters are calculated approximately using equivalent criteria (parameters) from NAAC accreditation and NBA accreditation process, and are provided in columns 4 & 5 of Table 1 for comparison and analysis.

NIRF Ranking uses 5 broad metrics, each assessed for 100 marks and its respective weightage as given in Table 1. Each metric has a set of sub criteria with the marks allotted as detailed on the NIRF website [1]. NIRF ranking of institutions is carried out every year. The first three metrics used in NIRF ranking are somewhat similar to those employed in NAAC and NBA accreditation processes. One can infer from Table 1

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that these three important metrics together constitute 80% weightage in NIRF ranking whereas they along with their equivalent metrics or criteria put together have only around 30% weightage in both NAAC accreditation and NBA accreditation. So both NAAC accreditation and NBA accreditation use some more criteria (metrics) that describe the PEOs, POs, curriculum, teaching-learning process, procedures, implementation, continuous improvement and outcomes, which altogether account for the remaining 70% weightage. So it can be deduced from this simple analysis that NIRF ranking is largely data-centric, i.e. marks are awarded for only data (figures) entered online and there in no marks for any theoretical

description, process definition and procedures. On the other hand both NAAC accreditation and NBA accreditation are data-centric as well as process-centric, wherein marks are awarded for both the data entered and for the theoretical description, process definition and procedures followed. However, NIRF ranking is very distinct in the sense that it effectively makes use of the latter two parameters, namely Outreach & Inclusivity and Perception, although their weightages are relatively low. Especially, Perception plays a vital role, which is assessed independently by a third party in a very transparent manner through the stake holders, renowned academic leaders and industry experts at national level.

Table 1 NIRF Ranking Parameters and Weightages vs. Weightages in NAAC Accreditation and NBA Accreditation

Sl. No.	Parameters / Criteria / Metrics	Weightage in NIRF ranking	Weightage in NAAC accreditation	Weightage in NBA accreditation
1	Teaching, Learning and Resources	0.30 (30%)	0.15 (15%)	0.13 (13%)
2	Research and Professional Practice	0.30 (30%)	0.10 (10%)	0.10 (10%)
3	Graduation Outcomes	0.20 (20%)	0.05 (5%)	0.08 (8%)
4	Outreach and Inclusivity	0.10 (10%)	0.01 (1%)	--
5	Perception	0.10 (10%)	--	--
Total		100%	≈ 30%	≈ 30%

Table 2 NAAC Accreditation Criteria and Marks

Sl.No.	Criteria	Marks and Category			
1	Curricular Aspects	150 (U)	150 (Au)	100 (Aff UG)	100 (Aff PG)
2	Teaching-Learning and Evaluation	200 (U)	300 (Au)	350 (Aff UG)	350 (Aff PG)
3	Research, Innovations and Extension	250 (U)	150 (Au)	110 (Aff UG)	120 (Aff PG)
4	Infrastructure and Learning Resources	100 (U)	100 (Au)	100 (Aff UG)	100 (Aff PG)
5	Student Support and Progression	100 (U)	100 (Au)	140 (Aff UG)	130 (Aff PG)
6	Governance, Leadership and Management	100 (U)	100 (Au)	100 (Aff UG)	100 (Aff PG)
7	Institutional Values and Best Practices	100 (U)	100 (Au)	100 (Aff UG)	100 (Aff PG)
Total		1000	1000	1000	1000

3.2 NAAC Accreditation Criteria and Weightage

NAAC accreditation uses 7 broad criteria to measure the overall quality of an Institution. Each criterion has quantitative and qualitative metrics as described elaborately on NAAC website. Table 2 shows the distribution of marks for all seven criteria under three

different categories [2], namely University (U), Autonomous Institution (Au) and Affiliated Institution (Aff) (UG & PG). NAAC accreditation is distinct from the NBA accreditation process with regard to data validation and verification process. The NAAC software selects random samples, and the data for nearly 70% of

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metrics are verified and validated in a transparent way so that the institution cannot play any role in changing or manipulating the data or documents after online submission and webhosting of the information. Though there is a metric to measure the feedback from local stakeholders, especially students' satisfaction survey, there is no robust method or component to measure the perception of the institution from independent academicians and industry experts at national level. Also, there is no scope to measure the outreach and inclusivity in terms of student count and faculty count from other states and regions in the country. So even if an institution has NAAC accreditation it is only catering to the needs of local students employing faculty members within the state. Therefore, if any institution

wishes to have a national presence then it has to look into outreach, inclusivity and perception. Accordingly, NAAC has to take note of this gap and incorporate the metrics for measurement of Outreach & Inclusivity and Perception as used in NIRF ranking, in order to bridge the gap and complete the quality loop.

3.3 NBA Accreditation Criteria and Weightage

NBA accreditation uses 10 extensive criteria to assess the Programme. Each criterion has sub criteria as described on NBA website [3]. Table 3 given below shows the distribution of marks for all criteria under two different categories, namely Tier I and Tier II Institutions.

Table 3 NBA Accreditation Criteria and Marks

Sl. No.	Criteria	Marks (Tier I)	Marks (Tier II)
1	Vision, Mission and Program Educational Objectives	50	60
2	Program Curriculum and Teaching-Learning Processes	100	120
3	Course Outcomes and Program Outcomes	175	120
4	Students' Performance	100	150
5	Faculty Information and Contributions	200	200
6	Facilities and Technical Support	80	80
7	Continuous Improvement	75	50
8	First Year Academics	50	50
9	Student Support Systems	50	50
10	Governance, Institutional support and Financial Resources	120	120
Total		1000	1000

The NBA accreditation process with 10 criteria covers a wide range of aspects concerning the whole gamut of the Programme. Though there is a provision to take the feedback from local stakeholders, it is recorded only as an observation, which is subjective but not incorporated for calculation of marks. Hence, there is no robust method or objective criterion to independently measure the feedback and perception of the Programme or Institution using third party academic and industry experts at national level. NBA has to take note of this shortcoming and improve the methodology to complete the quality loop.

4. Assessment, Ranking / Accreditation, Display / Report

4.1 NIRF Assessment and Ranking

The Ranking of Institutions under each category is done from highest score to lowest score out of 100 obtained by each Institution with '1' being the Top Rank and '100' or '200' being the Lowest Rank. Further for each Institution the score obtained out of 100 under

each of the 5 Metrics with an Overall score out of 100 is displayed.

The Ranking of Institutions is displayed on NIRF website in various categories such as Overall, Universities, Engineering, Medicine, Management, Architecture, Law, Pharmacy, Colleges (Arts & Science), etc.

4.2 NAAC Assessment Outcome

The final result of the Assessment and Accreditation exercise is a combination of evaluation of Qualitative and Quantitative Metrics. The Report comprises three parts.

(i) Peer Team Report

- **Section 1:** Provides **General Information** of the Institution.
- **Section 2:** Highlights Criterion-wise analysis based on peer evaluation of qualitative indicators. This is a *qualitative, descriptive assessment report* based on the Peer Team's critical analysis of strengths and weaknesses of HEI.

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- **Section 3:** Gives an *Overall Analysis*, which includes Institutional Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Challenges.
- **Section 4:** Records *Recommendations for Quality Enhancement of the Institution* (limited to 10 major points).

(ii) Graphical representation based on Quantitative Metrics (Q_nM)

This is a **System Generated Quality Profile** of the HEI based on statistical analysis of quantitative indicators in the NAAC's QIF (Quality Indicator Framework). Graphical presentation of Institutional features is reflected through synthesis of quantifiable indicators.

(iii). Institutional Grade Sheet

Institutional Grade Sheet generated by Software is based on Qualitative Indicators, Quantitative Indicators and Student Satisfaction Survey using existing calculation methods.

4.3 NBA Evaluation Report

The NBA Evaluation Report consists of two parts, namely:

- **Chairperson's Visit Report** detailed in Part-A, Part-B and Part-C.
- **Evaluator's Visit Report** detailed in Part-A, Part-B and Part-C.

It also includes a report on observations highlighting Strengths, Weakness and Opportunities to improve the Programme.

5. Benefits of Ranking and Accreditation

5.1 Benefits of NIRF Ranking

NIRF rank is a measure of the degree of excellence of an Institution at national level. It is a great recognition of the wonderful overall performance of an Institution. It is credible evidence that an institution's performance is laudable and comparable with that of other institutions nation-wide. It provides a great mileage to the Institution at pan India level to attract students from various parts of the country to improve outreach, inclusivity and perception, and benchmark its performance.

5.2 Benefits of NAAC Accreditation

- A good NAAC grade is recognition of Institution's performance.
- NAAC assessment process helps the Institution to know its strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities for improvement through an informed review process.

- The NAAC accreditation process enables identification of areas for improvement at Institutional level.
- The NAAC process provides an Institution a new direction to grow and identify itself amongst the better institutions.
- With a good NAAC grade, an Institution is eligible to receive funds from Govt. and other Research Organizations.
- The Institution is obliged to provide quality education and provide reliable information on its website.
- Institution must practise innovative and modern methods of teaching-learning.
- Employers will have an assurance about the Institution's commitment to quality and visit the College for recruitment of the students/graduates.
- The Society recognises the Institution as the Best or Better one amongst the rest.

5.3 Benefits of NBA Accreditation

- NBA accreditation is recognition of a Programme's good performance.
- Through accreditation process the Programme knows its strengths, weakness, and opportunities for improvement through review.
- Accredited Programme offers the standard quality education. Accreditation enhances stake-holders' confidence that the Programme is committed to offer quality education.
- Accreditation enables better enrolment to the Programme as Parents and Students are assured about the quality of education.
- Accredited Programme strengthens Students' learning and Graduates' attributes to meet Industry's needs.
- Employers recognise accredited programme and consider prospective recruitment of graduates.
- The Degree offered by the Accredited Programme has recognition at International level as there is equivalence of such programmes.
- An Accredited Programme demonstrates accountability to the Society, through continuous improvement to achieve excellence.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

It is seen over a period of time that the NIRF ranking list is dominated by IISc, IITs, IIMs, NITs and other Universities of higher learning. This indeed is credible

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evidence that all these high-performing institutions within the top notch of ranking have attained a greater degree of excellence in education. They already impart high quality, holistic and outcome based education and consequently majority of the graduates have high success rate/impact, and thus there is no need to accredit the programmes offered by such top institutions in India. Followed by these institutions of national importance, there are other institutions, which find their place towards the bottom side of ranking. There is a question whether these institutions and other institutions in the country have to achieve both accreditation and ranking or anyone? It is now evident that though NIRF ranking, NAAC accreditation and NBA accreditation make use of some similar metrics and some other specific criteria for assessment, the methodology of data collection, verification, validation, weightages assigned to different criteria/metrics and eventually the description/display of the outcomes are substantially different from each other. All the three measures are unique and not competitors to each other but together they provide multiple benefits to the Institutions. Hence it is desirable that all Tier I, Tier II and other institutions aspire to achieve all the three distinct measures, step by step sequentially, in order to add feathers in their cap and achieve fame.

Upon thorough analysis the author infers that the quantum of efforts and fulfillment of requirements to achieve each of the above three measures vary. It is relatively easier to achieve NBA accreditation as compared to NAAC accreditation, which in turn may be relatively easier to achieve as compared to NIRF ranking. For NBA accreditation, the entire process of assessment is largely centered on a particular Programme in an institution that offers several programmes or courses. The Department which offers that Programme shall fully focus on it and plan systematically to improve the input, process and outcome of the Programme over a period of 3-years and thus it will be comfortable to achieve NBA accreditation for that Programme either for 3-years or for 6-years. In this context, the popular institutions, which have wonderful infrastructure, student and faculty quality and numbers automatically focus on imparting outcome based education and used to naturally achieve NBA accreditation for one or more programmes. On the other hand, some institutions in order to achieve the end by whatever means, may resort to manipulations in terms of transferring few faculty members from a relevant programme to another programme and thus manage required faculty numbers and cadre ratio to achieve the minimum required scores. Few institutions even use to call only the known stake-holders like alumni, parents and industry experts and tutor them to give very positive feedback to the NBA evaluators and thus influence the process. Such institutions also try to create the

required documents for 2-3 years' period with the help of some consultants and somehow end up in securing accreditation for just 3-years, and thereafter they may not continue to impart outcome based education in letter and spirit as they never believe in long-standing quality. Thus the NBA assessment and accreditation that focuses on assessment of short-duration (3-years) data lacks the independent verification and validation of the opinion/perception in terms of transparent third party feedback and perception. Thus, it is recommended that NBA shall make use of the robust DVV process used in NAAC methodology and also include Perception metric of NIRF to get independent and true opinion on the overall quality of the Programme being accredited.

To achieve NAAC accreditation, an Institution has to work continuously for at least 5-years and improve the overall quality and performance concerning all programmes. Thus some institutions fail to achieve NAAC accreditation or struggle to end up in securing B+ grade or lower grades, subject to few exceptions. Some other institutions are successful in securing NBA accreditation but fail to achieve NAAC accreditation. This is due to the fact that it is easier to improve the quality of a Programme as compared to improve the overall quality of an Institution, which is based upon the logic that it is always easier to focus on a small entity, improve and achieve the outcome as compared to focusing on a relatively bigger entity with more struggle to achieve the outcome. There may be few exceptions that some institutions have secured NAAC accreditation but could not achieve NBA accreditation. Hence it is largely concluded that achieving NBA accreditation is relatively easier as compared to achieving NAAC accreditation. Though NAAC has an inbuilt robust DVV process, it does not include an important measure of Perception. Hence, it is recommended that NAAC shall include a specific metric to objectively measure the Perception of an Institution similar to the NIRF methodology to bridge the gap and complete the quality loop.

For achieving NIRF ranking, an Institution no doubt has to take care of all quality and performance aspects as required for NBA and NAAC accreditation but it has to especially establish its footing in respect of Outreach, Inclusivity and Perception, which are very relevant metrics at national level. The NIRF data verification and validation is coordinated by NBA office and entirely carried out by the third party without any influence from the institutions. Whereas in NAAC and NBA assessment and accreditation processes, the inspection and verification is done at the site and sometimes there may be a chance for the institutions to influence the assessment. Hence achieving NIRF ranking is relatively difficult for an institution, as compared to achieving NAAC accreditation and NBA accreditation, put in that order. So it is concluded that,

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for a particular institution, the totality of quality aspects and efforts required to achieve NIRF ranking is > than that required to achieve NAAC accreditation, which in turn is > than that required to achieve NBA accreditation. Thus, considering all aspects and overall scenario, it is largely opined that NIRF ranking > NAAC accreditation > NBA accreditation.

Finally, it is strongly recommended that institutions shall follow transparent procedures, commit to

continuously impart good quality outcome based education and take steps to genuinely improve in all possible spheres to achieve excellence at both Programme level and Institutional level to naturally achieve NBA accreditation, NAAC accreditation and NIRF ranking. NBA accreditation helps institutions to continuously achieve excellence of one or more Programmes, and NAAC accreditation and NIRF ranking help Institutions in achieving excellence at national level.

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