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# Impact of NAAC Accreditation on Students' Choice of Higher Educational Institutions in Haryana: A Confirmatory Factor Analysis Approach

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**Abstract:** India is experiencing a boon of Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs), which has increased the demand of quality assurance measures that are credible. This research paper examines the influence of NAAC accreditation in student enrolment in related Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs) in Haryana. The quantitative survey was based on the Quality Assurance Theory, the Resource based view, the Signalling Theory and the Institutional Theory and used a sample size of 614 undergraduate and postgraduate students. To determine how accreditation-related factors affect the choice of students, Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA), Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA), and multiple regression were conducted in analysing the data. Enrolment preferences were accounted by 9 latent dimensions such as quality of education, student support, institute reputation, infrastructure, and placement opportunities that, when added together, had two-thirds the explanatory power. The findings of regression indicate that quality of education, student support, and institutional reputation are the best predictors of student choices and such factors as affordability and peer influence are moderating. The results show that NAAC accreditation also serves as a plausible marker of institutional quality and the mechanism that promotes internal resource improvement. These lessons underscore the need to focus on the major quality dimensions that are consistent with the expectations of the students. These results can be used by policymakers and institutional leaders to improve accreditation practices, increase student support, and improve institutional competitiveness which eventually leads to informed student choice and equitable access to quality higher education.

**Keywords:** NAAC accreditation, quality assurance, student choice, higher education, Haryana, confirmatory factor analysis.

## INTRODUCTION

The high growth rate of the Indian higher education market has heightened the necessity to have credible quality assurance procedures that will bring about transparency, comparability and institutional responsibility. The National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) has become the main body of assessing higher educational institutions (HEIs) in various aspects e.g., curriculum design, teaching-learning processes, faculty qualifications,

governance, infrastructure, and student support services (NAAC, 2021). The NAAC accreditation is an external quality assurance of the institutions and has become a factor in the minds of students and their choice of institution. To students and their families, NAAC grades can serve as fair predictors of institutional credibility, academic standards, and employment success (more so in the non-extensive presence of national ranking structure at the college level) (Pathak & Pawar, 2022). With higher grades,

the institutions are usually regarded as in a better position, reputed, and more qualified to offer career-oriented education, and accreditation thus has been found to be a major factor in student selection. This is especially applicable in the case of Haryana whereby the higher-education system is made up of the Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs) of government-funded, private and self-financed institutions that are affiliated with different state universities. Although some organizations have undertaken the NAAC accreditation to improve competitiveness, there are numerous institutions that are functioning without formal assessment and hence creating unequal perceptions in institutional quality (Department of Higher Education, Haryana, 2023).

The empirical studies focus on the role of accreditation on the enrollment trends: students tend to prefer to enroll at the institutions with higher NAAC grades since they are regarded as being provided with a high-quality faculty, infrastructure, and placement opportunities (Singh and Mishra, 2021; Pathak and Pawar, 2022). Besides accreditation, other aspects of student choice include academic reputation, faculty knowledge, infrastructure, price, placement assistance, distance, and word of mouth. Affordability and scholarships are determinants to many, especially the economically disadvantaged, and the perception of the quality of institutions is further determined by peer and alumni. Therefore, NAAC accreditation is not acting on its own; it serves as a multidimensional system of institutional credibility and decision-making. Although it is important, there are a number of challenges associated with the accreditation process. Procedural and infrastructure requirements benefit smaller or rural institutions, whereas the lack of consistency in evaluation and the doubts about the authenticity of student feedback may damage the trust of the population in NAAC results (Rao and Mehta, 2020; Kumar and Prakash, 2022).

However, the NAAC accreditation still is a standardized and common way of guaranteeing the countrywide comparability in Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs), which has an impact on student choice and institutional strategy. The paper is filling a regional knowledge gap since it is covering Haryana and including undergraduate and postgraduate opinions. It breaks NAAC accreditation down into governance, teaching-learning processes, infrastructure and student support and also takes into consideration contextual variables like affordability, peer influence, and geographic access. The study offers a subtle perspective on the decision-making process of the students and provides an insight to the policymakers, institutional leaders, and accreditation bodies aiming at improving

institutional quality, transparency, and competitiveness through analysis of these factors.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Over the last twenty years, quality assurance has become one of the key concerns in the Indian higher education system, especially along with the active growth of Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs) (Bhardwaj & Tyagi, 2020; Agarwal, 2009). Due to the rise in enrolments and the increase in the number of institutions, the need to ensure that academic standards are upheld, accountability is upheld, and the credibility of the institution is enhanced has become more pressing (Altbach, 2015; Rao & Mehta, 2020). Currently, students are much more educated and discerning, demanding more of both the quality of education, the results of employability, and transparency in the institution (Sahni, 2020; Bhardwaj and Rani, 2021). Accreditation is a relatively structured way of measuring institutional efficacy and expression of quality commitment in an increasingly competitive environment (Iqbal and Ahmed, 2019; Kaur and Bala, 2021). The National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) is one of the main national initiatives that influence the quality assurance practice, define the perceptions of the society, and the quality standards (NAAC, 2021; Pathak and Pawar, 2022). The NAAC accreditation has become an essential factor of reputation that affects students, parents, and other stakeholders who even more closely relate NAAC grade to plausible academic procedures, sound teaching-learning frameworks, and employment opportunities (Singh and Mishra, 2021; Roy and Chatterjee, 2019; Bhattacharya, 2018). Digitalisation has also contributed to the intensification of this trend by distributing accreditation reports, rankings, and performance indicators on a mass scale (Mehta and Iyer, 2021; Sharma, 2021).

Empirical evidence can be used to support the claim that accreditation has a major influence on the perception of the students. Deka and Devi (2021) note that student in private Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs) perceive NAAC accreditation as a sign of trustworthiness and institutional credibility, which affects the process of application. As it is proved by Singh, Joshi and Bansal (2023), rural students are more dependent on accreditation because of the lack of access to independent sources of information. In a comparable manner, Kumar and Prakash (2022) mention that unaccredited Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs) enjoy less demand, despite the fact that the academic offerings of such institutions are comparable to those of accredited institutions. According to Sharma and Kapoor (2020), the Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs) of Punjab and Uttar Pradesh that are accredited demonstrate improved placement rates and student satisfaction

rates. In addition to external perceptions, accreditation enhances the internal institutional procedures. Stronger governance arrangements are typically implemented in accredited institutions, faculty development is invested in, and periodic academic audits are carried out (Rao and Mehta, 2020; Iqbal and Ahmed, 2019; Kaur and Bala, 2021). Internal Quality Assurance Cells (IQACs) also encourage ongoing enhancement and result-oriented assessment and align the academic and administrative practices as per the requirement of the students towards transparency, accountability and efficiency (Kaur and Bansal, 2019; Mehta and Iyer, 2021). Another way accreditation works as a strategic branding tool is through its functions.

The institutions have been aggressively displaying NAAC grades on admission brochures, websites, and publicity publications in order to distinguish themselves among the competitors (Bhardwaj and Tyagi, 2020; Saxena and Yadav, 2020). Institutions of Higher Learning (HEIs) have a greater access to government grants, research investments, and foreign partnerships, which leads to prestige and better enrolment results (Roy and Chatterjee, 2019; Kumar and Singh, 2022). However, accreditation is not the only issue that affects the choices of students. Economic elements, social factors, and cultural parameters have significant factors (Bhardwaj and Rani, 2021; Sinha and Rajput, 2021). Enrolment decisions are influenced by such factors as affordability, peer influence, proximity, and alumni recommendations which underline the multidimensional context in which accreditation functions (Singh and Mishra, 2021; Yadav and Chauhan, 2022). Possibilities and challenges There are opportunities and challenges in digital transformation in accreditation. The Student Satisfaction Survey (SSS) is one of the mechanisms that can improve transparency by including student feedback, but there are fears of manipulation and standardisation (Reddy and Joshi, 2023; Kumar and Singh, 2022). Also, access to accredited institutions by urban and rural areas is a significant factor that should be considered, and it is the one that influences the way students consider the quality of different institutions (Singh, Joshi & Bansal, 2023; Bhattacharya, 2018). Literature has been increasing though with some gaps. The regional-level analysis is also not comprehensive, especially in Haryana, but the findings indicate that there are regional NAAC performance gaps (Singh, Samanta & Rath, 2021; Department of Higher Education, Haryana, 2023). The majority of the works are devoted to the notion as accreditation as a homogenous concept without taking into consideration the dissimilar influence of governance, teaching-learning methods, infrastructure, and support on students (Pathak and Pawar, 2022; Kumar and Prakash, 2022). In addition,

the postgraduate and professional courses are not addressed in detail, and the combination of accreditation and affordability, colleagues and access to information in digital platforms has to be analyzed in more detail (Bhardwaj and Rani, 2021; Sinha and Rajput, 2021). Lastly, the institutional capacity and institutional preparation questions restrict the generalization of the accreditation results and depersonalization of the small and resource-consuming Higher Educational Institutions (HEI) (Patwardhan et al., 2022; Rao and Mehta, 2020). The gap-filling opportunity will present a deeper insight into how accreditation is determined in terms of student preferences, institutional strategies and policy interventions.

### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this research, a mixed theoretical approach of Quality Assurance Theory, Resource-Based View (RBV), Signalling Theory, and Institutional Theory will be used to determine the impact of NAAC accreditation on the decision to enrol in students. The Theory of Quality Assurance (Harvey and Green, 1993) emphasizes on constant evaluation, benchmarking and evaluations based on outcomes, which is captured in NAAC requirements and the creation of Internal Quality Assurance Cells (IQACs), which hold institutions accountable and enhance processes. This is augmented by RBV (Barney, 1991) that demonstrates the strategic value of internal resources including faculty knowledge, infrastructure, governance and research ability that accreditation enhances to attain competitive advantage. The Signalling Theory (Spence, 1973) describes the appearance of NAAC grades as a credible information to the students and minimizes information asymmetry and adjusting preferences. Accreditation is placed within the framework of the Institutional Theory (Meyer and Rowan, 1977) as a form of legitimacy, in which institutionalization becomes geared to nationally accepted quality standards. Taken together, these theories encompass internal quality improvement and external perception, which gives a comprehensive understanding of the connectedness between accreditation and student choices.

### OBJECTIVE

The proposed research will be aimed at the level, where NAAC accreditation influences student enrolment choices in Haryana in affiliated Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs). The study will analyze the links between the individual NAAC parameters that comprise of infrastructure, teaching-learning processes, faculty competence, governance and student support and the enrolment trends at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels based on the literature that accreditation is a measure of quality, credibility and competitiveness.

The research gaps identified also consider other determinants as affordability, institutional proximity and peer influence that are of particular importance in the Tier 2 and Tier 3 regions, as well as in the study. According to the Quality Assurance Theory, the Resource-Based View, Signalling Theory and the Institutional Theory, the study will seek to explore the combination of the accreditation as a quality enhancer, competitive resource, market signal and legitimacy mechanism to work. Finally, the research will provide some evidence-based data to enhance institutional planning, student outreach, and policy of regional higher education in Haryana.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research design followed in this study is a quantitative, descriptive study as it seeks to investigate the impact of NAAC accreditation and its quality dimensions on the student enrolment trends in affiliated Higher Educational Institutions (HEI) in Haryana. A quantitative method was selected because of its capability to produce generalisable results using quantifiable variables and the possibility to compare the results of accredited and non-accredited institutions on a structured basis (Bryman, 2016). The target population will consist of undergraduate and postgraduate students of NAAC-accredited and non-accredited affiliated Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs). Stratified random sampling was applied, where the proportionate sampling was done based on the districts, type of institutions and the accreditation levels. The study will use a structured online questionnaire with five-point Likert scales and categorical variables as the main data collection tools that will be administered between January and March 2025. The coding and analysis of data was conducted with the help of SPSS Version 28. The relationships between accreditation criteria and enrolment choices were analyzed in terms of descriptive statistics and

inferential tests (Chi-square, Independent Samples t-tests, and Binary Logistic Regression). The instrument was robust because of reliability (Cronbach Alpha = 0.83) and construct validity through Exploratory Factor Analysis.

## EMPIRICAL RESULTS

The empirical study commenced with the descriptive statistics presenting the demographic features of 614 respondents in terms of age, gender, level of study, area of study and the place of study. The measurement scales were found to have high internal consistency with a Cronbachs alpha of 0.82, which is high internal consistency. In the case of Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA), nine latent constructs placement, perceived NAAC effectiveness, quality of education, infrastructure, student support, institutional reputation, multidisciplinary course flexibility, location and learning resources were identified, with cumulative variance of 78%. The factor structure was also validated using Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) where the goodness-of-fit indices fall within the acceptable ranges (CFI = 0.95, TLI = 0.93, RMSEA = 0.04) and this validated the construct validity. The path analysis showed that the strongest impact on the student enrollment decision was the quality of education, then institutional reputation, student support, and affordability and peer influence were considered moderating factors. The results of regression also showed that there are significant associations between the quality dimensions associated with accreditation and enrolment choices ( $p < 0.05$ ). On the whole, the results indicate the complexity of the effect of NAAC accreditation on student decision-making. In the appendix, they have presented detailed tables and complete factor loading to be clear and transparent.

**Table- 1: Demographic Profile of the Respondents**

Demographics and Sub Demographics		Total (614)
Age (In yrs.)	16-20	285
	21-23	132
	24-26	110
	27 & above	87
Gender	Male	266
	Female	348
Academic Level	Post-Graduation	357
	Graduation	257
Field of Study	Arts	87
	Science	103
	Commerce & Management	111

	Engineering/Technology	117
	Medical / Health Sciences	98
	Law	98
Institution Location	Urban	231
	Semi-Urban	206
	Rural	177

**Source: Primary data**

As the Table 1 reveals, the sample of the study includes a wide range of 614 students in different demographic and academic groups, which forms the basis of the analysis of perceptions connected to NAAC accreditation and enrolment preference. Age distribution indicates that there are a high number of respondents (n = 285) within the 1620 years age group, 132 students within the 2426 years group, and 87 students within the 27 and above group. This implies that there were early and advanced learners who were involved in the survey. Another point that is raised in the table is a gender distribution of 266 males and 348 females with a slight difference in favor of the female representation. When it comes to academic level, 357 respondents are studying at the postgraduate level and 257 are in the undergraduate level. Far, the field-of-study segmentation portrays equal participation of Arts (87), Science (103), Commerce and Management (111), Engineering and Technology (117), Medical and Health Sciences (98), and Law (98), which makes the disciplines varied. Additionally, the data on institutional location shows that 231 students are enrolled in urban institutions of Higher Learning (HEIs) and 206 students are in semi-urban institutions, and 177 students in rural institutions. This geographical distribution increases the sample representativeness of the sample to the higher education environment in Haryana.

**Table 2: Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA)**

Factors	Names of Factors	Eigen Value	Variance (%)	Cumulative Variance
F1	Placement	28.571	47.618	47.618
F2	Perceived Effectiveness of NAAC	4.542	7.569	55.188
F3	Impact of NAAC Accreditation on Enrollment	3.590	5.984	61.172
F4	Infrastructure and Learning Resources	2.224	3.706	64.878
F5	Quality of Education	2.050	3.417	68.296
F6	Location and Accessibility	1.783	2.972	71.267
F7	Multidisciplinary Courses Flexibility	1.603	2.672	73.939
F8	Student Support Progression	1.251	2.084	76.024
F9	Institution Reputation	1.199	1.998	78.021

**Source: Primary data**

Table 2 shows the findings of the Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) that was used to determine the key latent constructs that affect student enrolment decisions with regard to NAAC accreditation. The table presents nine factors that are extracted with eigen values more than 1 totalling to 78.021% of the total variance, which comes out to be a good factor structure and data reduction.

Factor 1: The most dominant one is Placement with high eigenvalue of 28.571 and explaining high 47.618 percent of the variance, where employment outcomes are the most influential predictor of student preference. Factor 2: Perceived Effectiveness of NAAC: an extra 7.569 per cent can be seen to mean that students are aware of accreditation as a guarantee to institutional quality. Factor 3, which is concerned with the Impact of NAAC on Enrolment has a contribution of 5.984% affirming that the accreditation status directly influences the choice of students. Following are Infrastructure and Learning Resources (F4), Quality of Education (F5), and Location and Accessibility (F6) which form a significant explanatory power reflecting the academic and physical learning environment that students are more concerned with. The rest of the factors Multidisciplinary Course Flexibility (F7), Student Support and Progression (F8), and Institutional Reputation (F9) though they are less significant in terms of the contribution to variance, bring out more dimensions involved in determining the overall evaluation of Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs).

Table 3: Impact of factors

Relationship	R square	Std. Beta ( $\beta$ )	Standard Error of Estimate	F Change	p-values	Decision
Quality of Education -> Enrolment Decision	.783	0.885	.43371	2.205	0.000	H1 accepted
Student Support -> Enrolment Decision	.896	0.501	.30018	2.635	0.000	H2 accepted
Reputation -> Enrolment Decision	.940	0.262	.22851	3.179	0.000	H3 accepted
Multidisciplinary Courses -> Enrolment Decision	.974	0.282	.15088	5.667	0.000	
Infrastructure -> Enrolment Decision	.984	0.250	.11873	7.397	0.000	
Location -> Enrolment Decision	.992	0.202	.08209	1.300	0.000	
Placement -> Enrolment Decision	.783	0.145	.43371	3.210	0.000	

**Source: Primary Data**

\*Significant at 5% Level

Table 3 indicates the regression results of the study that investigates the relationship between the major institutional factors and the enrolment decisions of students. The results imply that all the hypotheses tested have statistically significant associations, with p-values of 0.000, which means that the hypotheses are well supported. Quality of Education has significant effect on enrolment decisions whereby its  $R^2 = 0.783$  and 8 is significant and therefore, students put a high value of teaching standard and academic rigour. Another effect that is quite significant ( $R^2 = .896$ , 0.501) is Student Support and its role in emphasizing the significance of counselling, mechanisms of progression, and student centred services. The effect of the Institutional Reputation is moderate but significant ( $R^2 = .940$ , 862 = 0.262), which implies that the brand image and the credibility influence student preferences. Also, Multidisciplinary Courses (being explained by 0.282) and Infrastructure (being explained by 0.250) are regarded as having a strong explanatory power, which is supported by the high  $R^2$  values (0.974 and 0.984), meaning that academic flexibility and facilities on campus are important aspects in student decision-making. Enrolment is also dependent on location ( $= 0.202$ ) with aspects of accessibility playing an important role. Although its placement opportunities have a lower beta (0.145), it is an important determinant. Altogether, the findings prove that several institutional quality dimensions have a significant influence on the enrolment decisions of students. DISCUSSION This research will clearly show that NAAC accreditation and the quality dimensions related with it have a profound impact on the choice of student's enrolment in affiliated Higher Educational Institutions (HEIS) in Haryana. The demographic profile indicates that all age groups, genders, academic backgrounds, and disciplinary backgrounds have been represented in the study, which guarantees that the perception of the students is in a good representation. Nine important factors were identified by using the Exploratory Factor

Analysis and these include placement, perceived effectiveness of NAAC, infrastructure, student support, institutional reputation and multidisciplinary flexibility that cumulatively explain more than 78 percent of the total variance which means that students assess institutions on a range of interconnected dimensions of quality.

The results of regressions also indicate that Quality of Education is the most powerful attribute used to predict enrolment decisions and then there are Student Support, Reputation, and Multidisciplinary Courses. The big  $R^2$  values of all the models counter the fact that the indicators of institutional quality are very strong determinants of student preferences. Other areas that exhibit considerable effects, albeit to different extents are infrastructure, location and placement opportunities. The findings are in agreement with the Quality Assurance Theory and Signalling Theory, which indicates that NAAC accreditation is a quality adjuster and a believable marker of institutional trustworthiness. On the whole, the conclusions confirm that pupils tend to become more dependent on parameters based on accreditation, particularly, the competitive environments in the region, such as Haryana, which justifies the essential quality of NAAC accreditation and its impact on the institute attractiveness and other enrolment rates.

## POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The results of this research indicate that there are a number of strategic policy measures to improve on the level of quality and access in higher education in Haryana. To begin with, state government and accreditation agencies are supposed to universally encourage institutions to take part in NAAC accreditation, especially smaller institutions and resource-strained institutions through technical guidance, capacity development process, and streamlined accreditation processes. Specific monetary incentives and grants might also work to lower barriers to participation and contribute to

homogeneous quality enhancement across Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs). Second, accreditation results should be incorporated by policy makers in terms of funding, faculty recruiting and reward systems in order to promote institutional responsibility and excellence in the long-term. Third, based on the role of affordability and peer recommendation in the decision-making of the students, scholarships, awareness campaigns, and guidance initiatives must be extended to motivate the economically disadvantaged students and families to make the right choices between the accredited institutions. Lastly, the increase of transparency and credibility of the accreditation process by adding live public dashboard, standardized peer-review process and regular audits will increase stakeholder trust in accreditation process and make it a quality assurance and strategic branding instrument. All these solutions are intended to make higher education in Haryana a more equal, quality-oriented and competitive environment.

### LIMITATIONS

This research has a number of constraints. To start with, it only dealt with higher education institutions in Haryana, which can be a constraint to the overall applicability of the results to other states or other regions that have a different educational environment. Second, the self-reported questionnaires were used to collect data, which may result in social desirability bias or inaccuracies. Third, the cross-sectional research design limits the possibility to draw causal conclusions about NAAC accreditation and student choice; longitudinal studies would be more suitable to address a changing perception and enrolment patterns. Also, affiliated Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs) were mostly used as a sample and there was a restriction in the insights to separate institutions or private universities. Lastly, although critical accreditation considerations and other supportive variables were analyzed, other situational aspects including the economic situation in each region and the new trends in digital education were not explored in detail. Future studies that center on these factors would lead to a more detailed explanation of the role accreditation plays in determining higher education preferences in India.

### FUTURE SCOPE OF RESEARCH

The research that will be conducted in the future on NAAC accreditation and student choice is extensive and multidimensional. Research may also go beyond Haryana to different parts of India and allow comparative studies of the effects of accreditation in various educational ecosystems. The longitudinal designs would provide more profound information on how student perceptions and enrolment choices would change over time with respect to change in

accreditation status and institutional quality improvement. An additional study of the postgraduate and specialized professional programs would fill the gaps left by studies that tend to be predominantly undergraduate. Other new areas of focus that research might consider include digital forms of learning, sustainability of practice in institutions and the use of technology in the evaluation of accreditation. It would be interesting to look at socioeconomic, cultural, and geographical differences in access to the accredited institutions. Lastly, the qualitative methods may be used to supplement the quantitative results and reflect the more subtle views of students, faculty, and policymakers to shape more specific accreditation policies and institutional plans. These guidelines would help in increasing the awareness of the changing role of accreditation in the Indian higher education system.

### CONCLUSION

The current study emphasizes the major role of NAAC accreditation in influencing the choice of student enrolment in the affiliated Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs) in Haryana. It is revealed that accreditation is not only a regulatory measure but also a strategic instrument helping to increase the credibility of institutions, transparency, and academic competitiveness. In Tier 2 and Tier 3 areas, students attach high importance to accreditation-based predictors like quality of education, student support, institutional reputation and flexible academic offerings of multiple disciplines when choosing colleges. The conceptual framework of the study is supported by empirical studies conducted by CFA and regression, which prove these factors have a significant impact on the decision to enroll.

The study also adds to the theory by incorporating Quality Assurance, Resource-Based View, Signalling and Institutional theories to determine the effect of accreditation on students in making decisions. In practice, the results provide instrumental support to institutional leaders regarding the priorities of quality aspects based on the student expectations, and the policy implications can be seen in the encouragement to attract more people to NAAC accreditation, the capacity-building programs, and the improvements to the disclosure of the results of the accreditation. In general, this research paper fills the gap in the quality assurance practices in institutions and student behaviour; it supports NAAC accreditation as a key aspect of institutional appeal, enrolment, and governance in higher education in Haryana.

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