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Submitted: 08/08/2026 - Accepted: 27/08/2026 - Published: 28/09/2026

Competing Demands: A Critical Review of Stakeholder Accountability Models in Global Higher Education

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DOI: 10.26417/899cos4a

Abstract

Recent major crises of integrity in India's high-stakes national exams, including leaks of NEET UG papers in 2024 and 2026, have provoked a strong wave of public reaction. There have been student protests and calls for resignation of Government ministers. Also, a party called Cockroach Janata Party (CJP) was formed and is campaigning against systemic irregularities. This focused literature review synthesizes research by 47 authors to delineate a framework of accountability in higher education. The review is organized along five thematic lines: key components of accountability as a governing principle; distribution of accountability within the ecosystem of higher education; integrity of exams and their effect on public trust; assurance of quality and accreditation as accountability mechanisms; and the intersection of accountability with employability relevance and institutional governance. Drawing on scholarly work from India, South Asia, Europe, Africa, and Southeast Asia, this review shows that accountability goes beyond security measures and punitive actions. Accountability is a complex framework that includes financial transparency, ethical governance, freedom for scholars, stakeholder engagement, and evidence-based governance. The review provides a comprehensive framework for accountability in higher education organized around a conceptual table that identifies various dimensions of accountability, actors, and supporting evidence. This

framework seeks to support policy reform efforts that encompass not only the integrity of examinations but also the more fundamental systemic issues of quality, equity, autonomy, and public trust in higher education systems.

Keywords: university governance, neoliberalism, quality assurance, stakeholder theory, accountability

Introduction

In May 2026, India cancelled NEET UG undergraduate admissions test. Leak of a guess paper originating in Sikar, Rajasthan, matched the real paper, and this undermined the integrity of the exam (BBC News, 2026). This episode echoed one that happened two years earlier. Then NEET was beset by claims of organized paper leaks, disputes over grace marks, and procedural failures, which led the Ministry of Education to file an FIR with the CBI (The Indian Express, 2024). Across both cycles, millions of hopefuls suffered distress, including reports of suicides and despair, and this spilled into nationwide protests. This also heightened partisan disputes, and there were demands for an FIR led by the CBI, restructuring of the National Testing Agency (NTA), and resignation of Prime Minister Narendra Modi (Al Jazeera, 2026). Through nationwide campaigning against irregularities in exams, the Cockroach Janata Party (CJP) framed repeated malpractice as evidence of deeper failures of governance. Thus, a technical scandal broadened into a reckoning about accountability, questioning not just high-stakes tests but also the trust architecture of selection and governance in higher education in India.

This paper conducts a focused literature review synthesizing peer-reviewed research on accountability in higher education and its relation to governance, quality assurance, public administration, and accreditation. Specifically, the paper responds to three questions. First, how is accountability conceptualized in the literature on systems and institutions, and what are the primary theoretical frameworks? Second, who are key accountable stakeholders (ministers and agencies of government, regulators and accreditors, leaders of institutions, faculty and students), and what dimensions of accountability do they address? Third, how does a comprehensive understanding of accountability inform the design of reforms that go beyond integrity of examinations and address quality, employability transparency, and balance of autonomy and public regulation? The primary analytical focus is mapping accountability as a governance concept. The paper aims to synthesize scholarly work that engages policy discussions to situate current public concerns within an accountability framework.

The paper is grounded in the popular concept of stakeholder accountability. We attempt to extend this model to higher education, providing an integrated and comprehensive view of accountability. The conceptual framework is shown in Figure 1.

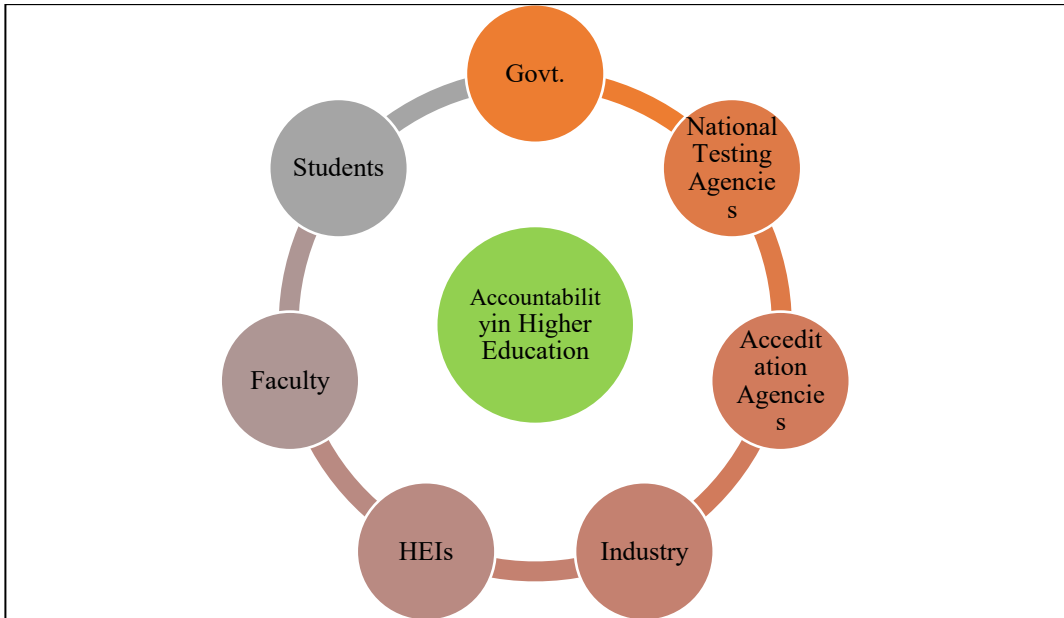


Figure 1: Conceptual framework for research

The novelty of the study lies in its holistic, integrated analysis of accountability in higher education. Unlike other works that address single issues such as integrity (Gheisari et al., 2026) or quality (Benneth & Dimlong, 2026), we present several dimensions of accountability. The issue is addressed holistically, considering all the major stakeholders, from the Government to students, as shown in Figure 1. In Table 1, we present the analysis of the exact accountability of different stakeholders.

As stated in the first paragraph, recent developments prompt us to think of accountability as a single issue of integrity. However, the focused review takes a broader view of the concept and encompasses several key dimensions of accountability. This is important, as a stand-alone approach to addressing accountability concerns would not lead to long-term, sustainable solutions. Therefore, the paper argues that accountability should be comprehensive. The central argument of the paper is that accountability issues in higher education require a multi-pronged, coordinated strategy, rather than lopsided attempts to address single issues such as integrity (Gheisari et al., 2026) or quality (Benneth & Dimlong, 2026). Such attempts will succeed only in the short term and will resurface in the long term unless addressed holistically. Our study fills this major gap.

Methodology

Approach and Rationale

This study uses Focused Literature Review (FLR) methodology to explore the multi-dimensional nature of accountability in higher education. A FLR differs from systematic literature reviews and meta-analyses. While systematic literature reviews attempt to comprehensively identify all existing studies and meta-analyses seek to combine studies to obtain a statistical result, an FLR focuses on the literature pertinent to the conceptual issue of immediate importance and provides a synthesis (Rai, 2026). The FLR was driven by the NEET paper leak incidents of 2024 and 2026, which revealed protest-inducing systemic weaknesses in India's examination system and led to the Prime Minister's resignation requests and civil society (CJP) activism. These incidents showed that the public debate on accountability in higher education is often limited to exam integrity. It does not consider the governance system(s) that underpin the exams. Therefore, an FLR approach was chosen to outline the conceptual landscape of accountability in peer-reviewed literature, thus framing policy discussions in the absence of an immediate crisis context. The aim was not to enumerate all empirical studies but to identify the components, stakeholders, and conflicts that define accountability as a concept of governance in its entirety, covering quality control, institutional independence, financial transparency, employability, and public confidence (Ghogare & Ramchandani, 2025).

Through a synthesis of comparative research on India and international studies, this review presents an integrative study of accountability within higher education systems as suggested by Reshma et al. (2024) and Bhuiyan (2026), who both emphasize that in order to meet today's evolving expectations of legitimacy for governance models, those models will have to be fundamentally restructured. Studies using the FLR format allow researchers to select the most pertinent studies available while at the same time providing the researcher with the ability to maintain sufficient depth and clarity throughout their studies to support the complexity of accountability as a construct that has roots in law, policy, management, ethics, and pedagogy (Sallam, 2026).

Search Strategy and Database Selection

To find a balance that was both comprehensive in scope and ensured the bibliographic accuracy of the research findings, a literature search was conducted across all major academic databases (such as Scopus, Web of Science, and others) and publisher records. The candidate records from these database searches were identified using a systematic search approach utilizing iterations of the keywords "accountability", "governance in higher education", "quality assurance", "accreditation", "integrity of examinations", "employability", "institutional autonomy", and "public trust," focusing specifically on the Indian context and comparative examples for other nations. Each potential record's title and abstract were reviewed against the questions being asked in this review, and each potentially relevant empirical or conceptual full-text article was also reviewed to determine how it addressed accountability. All duplicate articles were eliminated by title, author, date, and DOI. The final synthesis set consisted of 47 research articles, selected for

inclusion in the review based on topical relevance, scholarly merit, and distribution across the review's thematic axes.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The inclusion criteria specified that sources must be peer-reviewed journal articles or conference proceedings in recognized scholarly venues and address accountability, governance, quality assurance, integrity, or policy in higher education. Sources were expected to engage substantively with accountability as a concept or practice, rather than reference it in passing. While studies pertaining to the context of the crisis in India were prioritized, other comparative and international studies were included if they provided insights into the structures of governance, mechanisms of accreditation, or tensions of accountability that could be applicable to the circumstances in India (Hajido et al., 2025; AlHajri et al., 2025). Given the rapid changes seen in accountability frameworks, preference was given to works published from 2010 onwards. Earlier works providing a theoretical basis remained without any temporal boundaries. The exclusion criteria consisted of studies which have no policy or governance analysis concerning examination delivery mechanisms, studies, unpublished works without formal publication status, and works where accountability was used as a buzzword for business or school level contexts with no reference to higher education. As indicated, grey literature was excluded from the synthesis corpus. Deliberate attention was placed on preserving methodological heterogeneity. This included quantitative studies of accreditation outcomes (Hussain, 2026; Srijampana et al., 2025), qualitative governance case studies (Khun et al., 2025; Saifuddin & Idris, 2026), papers of a conceptual or theoretical nature (Ekmekcioglu, 2026), and systematic reviews (Gorostidi and Rubio-Arostegui, 2026; Pramono and Widiyanto, 2024). The bibliographic information for the retained sources was checked against the publishers' records and available DOIs, yielding a synthesized corpus of 47 contributions that examine accountability as a multidimensional issue in governance.

Conceptualizing Accountability in Higher Education

In the realm of higher education, accountability is an unsettled, multi-faceted construct that spans legal requirements, professional standards, market demands, and the principles of democracy (Khun et al., 2025). Accountability is not solely an exercise in reporting. It is a relational concept in which institutions and actors are required to explain their performance to their stakeholders and face repercussions for their shortcomings. In India, the recent breakdown of trust in the credibility of national examinations has shifted accountability from the realm of academic discourse to the more turbulent arena of public discourse, and placed demands for answerability, responsibility, and enforcement throughout the entire governing framework.

Since the 1980s, the global phenomenon of New Public Management (NPM) has influenced contemporary understandings of accountability. NPM has redefined

higher education institutions as quasi-market actors with a focus on efficiency, performance, and measurable outputs (Khun et al., 2025). NPM has shifted accountability from professional trust-based systems to managerially oriented, performance-driven practices and has created ongoing conflict between academic professional autonomy and external control (Ekmekçioğlu, 2026). This conflict is embedded structurally and in policy tools such as performance-based funding, which provides control over the distribution of resources to achieve specific, quantifiable goals. Gándara and Daenekindt (2022) state that the public discourse of these schemes structures accountability systems in a way that prioritizes market-based accountability and disregard for social equity. Thus, quality assurance and accreditation systems become the main tools of accountability for operationalizing NPM through standardized metrics (Gorostidi & Rubio-Arostegui, 2026).

Who Is Accountable for What in Higher Education

In the context of Indian higher education, the NEET-UG paper leak crises and similar events have made the question of who responds to which outcomes more pressing. Governance is a web of structures, each with distinct functions that make up the accountability ecosystem. Building on current research, this part attempts to identify the major stakeholders (government, testing authorities, regulators, university management, faculty, students, industry, and civil society) and their specific responsibilities, particularly the state's responsibility to safeguard the integrity of high-stakes national exams.

University leadership, vice-chancellors, boards, and academic councils bear institutional responsibility for demonstrating other aspects of policy implementation, including clear and open decision-making, sound financial management, and the fostering of a learning-friendly environment on campus. Research considers institutional governance a fundamental aspect of accountability and correlates governance quality with the degree of self-regulation and public trust (Chairuddin et al., 2025). Adeusi et al. (2024) show that universities must adopt innovative cost management and financial transparency to be considered legitimate. The CABE autonomy committee suggested that heads of institutions publicly report on their performance and establish internal quality assurance cells. University administrators' accountability includes ethical governance to mitigate corruption and the strategic management and harmonization of the curriculum with societal needs (Rizqiyanto et al., 2024).

Members of the faculty have responsibilities regarding the integrity of their scholarship and research, the fairness of their grading, the quality of their teaching, and the ethics of their research. In professional education settings, documented instances of academic dishonesty undermine trust in the validity of credentials (Kasula et al., 2026; Waqas et al., 2025). Within faculty governance, structures of collective responsibility may address curriculum updates, ethical supervision of faculty, and student welfare (Angela et al., 2026).

Students are accountability partners. Their official representation in governance bodies enhances the transparency and responsiveness of institutions (Alhamad & Hayat, 2025). When students mobilize to call for the resignation of certain politicians or the closure of a testing agency deemed unjust, as was the case following the 2026 NEET-UG cancellation, they advocate for substantive change. Each student is responsible for maintaining honesty in the academic process and using emerging technologies ethically; this level of accountability requires institutions to provide support and structures through their respective codes of conduct (Misra et al., 2025).

Employers and industry represent a constituency external to accountability. The gap between graduates' skills and the needs of the labor market compels HEIs to develop appropriate curricula. Ghogare and Ramchandani (2025) describe skilling as a tripartite accountability framework involving HEIs, industry, and policymakers, in which industry must provide feedback, co-create curricula, and not exploit students.

Corporate accountability includes responsible recruitment and the avoidance of commodification that exacerbates inequity (Parveen & Divya, 2025). Industry accountability cannot be understood without higher education assuming responsibility for promoting fair and sustainable development (Sallam, 2026). Finally, civil society, such as media, NGOs, parent associations, and the Cockroach Janata Party, functions as an informal system of accountability by collecting complaints and consolidating student voices. Where formal governance is absent, the literature points to stakeholders contributing to the deepening of institutional accountability as well (Saifuddin & Idris, 2026). Protests following leaks of NEET UG exemplify how civil society channels individual anger into a unified call for systemic change, thereby strengthening the accountability ecosystem from the grassroots level.

When viewed collectively, these accountabilities show that governance is a fabric of interrelated responsibilities. The integrity of national examinations requires collaborative efforts from government, agencies, regulators, and society. The table below illustrates these relationships.

Table 1. Accountability dimensions, responsible actors, and supporting literature

Accountability dimension	Who is accountable	Citations
Exam integrity and national test administration	Central government; national testing agencies; exam centres	(Kumar & Manjula, 2023; Teshome, 2025; Khun et al., 2025)

Quality assurance and accreditation	Accreditation bodies; institutional leaders; faculty	(AlHajri et al., 2025; Rini et al., 2025; Kumaravelu & Suresh, 2021)
Curriculum relevance and employability outcomes	HEIs; faculty; industry; policymakers	(Ghogare & Ramchandani, 2025; Turman, 2026; Salim et al., 2025; Rai, 2026)
Institutional governance and transparency	Boards; VCs; regulators	(Madegowda, 2026; Kasope et al., 2024; Adeusi et al., 2024)
Academic integrity and ethical conduct	Faculty; students; integrity units	(Angela et al., 2026; Waqas et al., 2025; Kasula et al., 2026; Srivastava et al., 2026)
Public trust and political answerability	Elected executives; ministry; public sphere	(Kumar & Manjula, 2023; Pratiwi & Kusumah, 2024)
Autonomy-accountability balance	State; regulators; academic bodies	(Teshome, 2025; Ekmekçioğlu, 2026)
Equity and student welfare in high-stakes pathways	Government; HEIs; professional councils	(Parveen & Divya, 2025; Thomas, 2024; Gándara & Daenekindt, 2022)

Exam Integrity, Public Trust, and Political Accountability

The recent NEET-UG paper leak crisis and similar incidents reveal a fundamental lack of transparency and accountability in the practices of examination bodies. Smith (2025) contends that new technologies have the potential to improve public accountability. However, ongoing leaks indicate a lack of data-driven governance by both the National Testing Agency and the Ministry of Education in managing test security or in disclosing performance data. Kasope et al. (2024) put forward a proposal on how to use data-driven decision-making integrated into governance to improve transparency; the case of NEET shows that when the public has no credible information available, it leads to rumors, unrest, and the political instrumentalization of a situation, as a result of the widespread protests and the calls for a CBI investigation.

In conclusion, leaks from NEET papers show that exam security cannot be treated solely as a technical issue for one exam. Protests, political repercussions, and the erosion of public trust indicate that assessment integrity fits within a broader accountability framework that encompasses regulatory structures, institutional governance, stakeholder engagement, and political accountability. Long-lasting reforms will have to be parallel to higher-quality education, clear accreditation (Kumari, 2025), robust systems for whistleblowers, and recalibration of self-

governance and public control. Otherwise, even the most secure exam will be a weak foundation for hopes of millions.

Quality Assurance, Accreditation, and Institutional Accountability

Quality assurance (QA) and accreditation as part of the accountability framework of higher education translate institutional responsibilities into concrete expectations and measurable standards. With worldwide reach, increased public funding, and stakeholder concerns manifesting as demands for easily measurable quality and governance, the turmoil is palpable (Rini et al., 2025; Srijampana et al., 2025). In India, the 2024 and 2026 NEET-UG paper leaks starkly exposed the public trust. Oversight on quality is critical to maintaining trust. While securing an examination is part of the accountability perimeter, QA frameworks on examination security address accountability, while other structures in the broader accountability span address accountability for the relevance of the curriculum, institutional quality, and the employability of graduates.

Comparative international studies show that accreditation systems enhance accountability. In Oman, the national authority (OAAAQA) enhances governance by legitimizing, making transparent, and incorporating flexible and strategic approaches (AlHajri et al., 2025). Indonesian private universities, which have incorporated national (BAN-PT) and international quality models, report improved public trust as a result of autonomy, transparency, and accountability (Pratiwi & Kusumah, 2024). In Nepal, QA is seen as a means of improvement and credibility enhancement, fostering self-reflection and responsiveness to stakeholders (Bista, 2025). In Yunnan, China, although there are structural hurdles for third-party organizations, the goal is to strengthen independent oversight as a means of accountability (Kumar et al., 2025). These examples demonstrate the same principle: Effective accreditation systems provide the accountability framework required to make institutional performance, standards, and responsiveness to state and societal expectations visible.

In conclusion, Quality Assurance (QA) and Accreditation represent two key forms of Institutional Accountability. Both forms of institutional accountability have an empirical mechanism that assures the public that their trust is warranted; both serve to foster positive motivation; and both contribute to substantive legitimacy. The crisis over examination integrity in India has highlighted the importance of moving beyond mere compliance with QA frameworks; beyond merely ticking boxes against QA metrics; and beyond QA's reliance on metrics toward promoting greater transparency, accountability, and a culture of excellence centered on learning. Therefore, if there is awareness within the academic community of the integrity of the processes used to produce results and of the relevance of those results,, it is also possible to close the gap between the formal QA system(s) of accountability and the informal system(s) of accountability.

Employability, Outcomes, and Socio-Economic Accountability

The greatest burden of outcome accountability must concentrate on Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). This has been the focus of literature on institutional responsibility. Rai (2026) contends that Indian higher education should be evaluated not just on enrolments and accreditation levels, but on its ability to provide industry-relevant knowledge and promote critical thinking. This situates institutional responsibility as the bedrock of quality. The ongoing disconnect between market expectations and the attributes of graduates has been described by Parveen and Divya (2025) as the “boon-bane paradox”, a system that empowers millions while aggravating socio-economic inequity, and reinforces the urgency for accountability for the employability of graduates. Ghogare and Ramchandani (2025) document the disconnection in management education empirically, where traditional curricula come under “significant scrutiny” as employers raise concerns regarding the work-readiness of graduates, a finding that extends to even more disciplines beyond business. When HEIs do not revise curricula, upgrade and expand career services and industry partnerships, they violate the public trust that justifies their funding and autonomy, and that violation is an accountability deficit.

Given this, the accountability map must specify responsibility for employability and socio-economic outcomes. Governments are accountable for providing labor market intelligence and funding and regulatory frameworks that shape and incentivize skill formation, and HEIs are accountable for providing relevant curricula, high-quality pedagogy, placement assistance, and transparent reporting on graduates' employment outcomes. Accreditation agencies have meta-accountability for ensuring that outcome standards are substantive and audited, not just declarative. The chain of accountability also extends to employers, who, through industry advisory boards and internship agreements, share responsibility for co-producing work-ready graduates. Amghar et al. (2026) encapsulate this multi-actor logic, stating that marketization and digitalization have transformed HEIs into intricate organizations whose performance must be assessed in terms of the complex interplay among academic, financial, and social outcomes. Thus, the NEET crisis serves as an entry point to a wider reform agenda. Trust in Indian higher education will not be restored by simply revising examination security; it will also require a comprehensive reconstruction of accountability so that any degree awarded can be assumed to guarantee capability, opportunity, and social mobility.

Governance, Autonomy, Transparency, and Multi-Actor Accountability

The theoretical relationship between institutional autonomy and public accountability is complicated. Autonomy, including academic, financial, and organizational autonomy, is considered a prerequisite for excellence and innovation (Teshome, 2025). However, a lack of transparency regarding autonomy risks insulating institutions from justified criticism, particularly in South Asia, where rapid privatization has outpaced regulation (Bhuiyan, 2026). Majozi et al. (2025) incorporate this into a framework of constitutional rights, noting that section 16(1)

of the South African Constitution guarantees academic freedom while also establishing public accountability as a governing principle.

Student participation in governance is an important but neglected issue. Alhamad and Hayat (2025) show that student involvement legitimizes and increases the responsiveness of assurance systems. Majozi et al. (2025) place student voice within discourse on access and equity. Saifuddin and Idris (2026) apply this to Indonesian higher Islamic education and argue stakeholder participation supports accountability through deliberative theory of practice. Adeusi et al. (2024) say ethical governance and cost creativity enhance transparency in financial governance. Sallam (2026) says meritocratic governance requires transparent appointments, performance-based promotion, and controls against corruption for sustainable development. Rizqiyanto et al. (2024) show that robust whistleblowing systems are crucial for detecting academic fraud, yet such systems remain lacking.

Discussion

Revisiting the Meaning of Accountability after the NEET Crisis

Although scholarly literature has recognized the multidimensionality of accountability in higher education, most studies have focused on accountability for institutional quality assurance, financial accountability, and academic governance (Adeusi et al., 2024). With the NEET crisis, two more dimensions of accountability become obvious. Foremost, accountability must include procedural justice in high-stakes accountability assessments. This means that there are some standards for how candidates are selected, and the selection process is not susceptible to manipulation. The Sikar 'guess paper' leak and the arrest of middlemen show that the breach of examination security is a governance failure, not a logistical one. Next, the crisis reinforces the importance of building and maintaining the public's trust in accountability. This has been discussed in transparency literature and stakeholder engagement literature, but has not been applied to the collapse of entire examination systems.

Integrating Dimensions: From Exam Security to Holistic Higher Education Accountability

It is reasonable to consider "fixing the exam" by strengthening document security and using biometrics, but this would focus too narrowly on examination logistics, thereby misdiagnosing the accountability deficit revealed by the NEET crisis. Accountability in higher education consistently emerges in the literature as a web combining quality, employability, governance, transparency, and public trust (Rai, 2026; Ghogare & Ramchandani, 2025; Hussen & Onia, 2024). Therefore, holistic reform must integrate exam integrity with these other components rather than treating exam integrity as a standalone technical issue.

Mechanisms of quality assurance, especially accreditation, have emerged as the main tool for ensuring institutional accountability. The National Assessment and

Accreditation Council, for example, analyzes and evaluates research, curricular frameworks, and infrastructure, and has been credited with fostering quality consciousness throughout Indian higher education (Hussain, 2026; Srijampana et al., 2025). The literature, however, reveals tendencies toward ritualistic compliance and isomorphism, whereby institutions superficially implement structures to please assessors without embedding a culture of continuous improvement (Gorostidi & Rubio-Arostegui, 2026; Pramono & Widiyanto, 2024). Such form-over-substance quality assurance measures do little to alleviate the problem of examination fraud, particularly when the external examiner is away from the institution. The NEET experience indicates that quality frameworks need to consider the entire assessment value chain from the construction of assessment items to the declaration of results, and incorporate the prevention of fraud as a basic requirement of quality.

Effective oversight and protection for whistleblowers are essential for accountability (Boakye-Yiadom, 2025; Adeusi et al., 2024; Rizqiyanto et al., 2024). At a time of the NEET crisis, trust is central and connects all streams. When trust is lost, stakeholders dismiss technically sound reforms. Research on student satisfaction and institutional reputation shows that perceived fairness and transparency are just as important, and sometimes more important, than actual system quality (Thomas, 2024; Chairuddin et al., 2025). Every package of reforms needs to be designed with aspiring communities, civil society, and political stakeholders, and to shift accountability from top-down supervision to an active social contract. National protests and calls by CJP for systemic reform go beyond mere noise; they indicate a social demand for different forms of accountability, ranging from integrity guaranteed in a single document to the employability of the professionals it delivers.

Who-for-What Mapping as a Practical Accountability Device

Transforming the multidimensional conception of accountability into governable actions requires clarity on specific roles and responsibilities. As a form of analysis, conceptual “who-for-what” mapping can identify shortcomings and create a blueprint for integrated reforms. When accountability dimensions are assigned to specific actors, such a mapping can show overlaps, absences, and orphaned areas of responsibility; precisely the gaps that NEET crises exploited.

The highest level in the accountability framework is the government, which has ultimate political and regulatory responsibility for ensuring that national examinations are conducted smoothly and equitably. In India, the Ministry of Education and the NTA, Government of India, are expected to implement safe testing measures, manage vendor agreements, and ensure prompt investigations into testing malpractice (Madegowda, 2026; Lavanya, 2024). The government level also includes the police and intelligence services that target and dismantle ‘leak mafias’, a role that came into focus, for example, with the CBI’s involvement in the NEET case. Outside of examinations, the government is responsible for the policies and legislation that create a framework for accountability, including mandates for transparency, data

release, and outcome reporting in all Higher Education Institutions, as repeatedly requested in various policy frameworks (Ministry of Education, 2023).

Conclusion

Conceptual mapping resulting from this study shows accountability is not singular and is not solely the government's responsibility. Government bodies such as the UGC and statutory bodies like NAAC are responsible for national exams, regulation, and funding supervision (Reshma et al., 2024; Madegowda, 2026; Kumar and Manjula, 2023). NAAC is responsible for setting and checking quality standards (Hussain, 2026; Kumaravelu & Suresh, 2021). Higher education institutions are responsible for internal assurance of quality and sound financial management (Kasope et al., 2024; Adeusi et al., 2024; Boakye-Yiadom, 2025). Faculty and leadership are also responsible for upholding academic freedom and responsiveness of curriculum to economic needs (Teshome, 2025; Güneş & Kaban, 2025; Turman, 2026). Students also serve as co-governors and help foster integrity (Alhamad & Hayat, 2025; Misra et al., 2025). Viewing accountability failures, such as a leak, as just surface issues usually points to deeper systemic problems in governance, autonomy, and public trust.

Declarations

Acknowledgment: Authors acknowledge support of Yogesh Wagh, Pune, India, in checking the manuscript for grammar correctness.

Authors' individual contributions: Conceptualization—AK, RS, MP, SR; Methodology—SRK, RD, Investigation— AK, RS, MP, RD, SRK, SR; Software—MS; Validation—RD and SRK; Formal Analysis— AK, RS, MP, RD, SRK, SR; Resources—SRK ; Data Curation—RD; Visualization—RD; Supervision—AK and SR; Project Administration—MP; Writing—Original Draft— AK, RS, MP, RD, SRK, SR; Writing—Review & Editing— AK, RS, MP, RD, SRK, SR

Declaration of conflicting interests: The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

Funding Declaration: No funding was received for the study.

Data Availability Statement: The data used in the paper is cited through references.

Consent to Participate: Not applicable.

Ethics approval: Not applicable.

Consent for publication: All authors have read and approved the final version of the manuscript and consent to its publication.

Declaration of generative AI and AI-assisted technologies in the writing process: During the preparation of this work the author(s) used Grammarly in order to improve the quality of the writing and ensure correct English spelling and

grammar. After using this tool/service, the author(s) reviewed and edited the content as needed and take full responsibility for the content of the published article.

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