

Undergraduate Students' Expectations of Teaching and Learning: A Multi-Stream Analysis in Higher Education

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Article Type: Research Article

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Received: 14 October 2025;

Revised: 02 February 2026;

Accepted: 26 April 2026

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Abstract

In the evolving higher education landscape, understanding, prioritizing, and meeting students' needs is vital for service quality, institutional survival, and competitiveness. This study assesses the undergraduate students' expectations in regard to teaching, learning, assessment types, and teacher qualities in Kathmandu Valley. A descriptive research design with a quantitative survey approach was employed. Data were collected from 611 newly enrolled undergraduate students in Management, Information Technology, and Humanities programs within the Kathmandu Valley and analyzed using frequency distribution, mean scores, ranking analysis, the Kruskal–Wallis H test, and post hoc Mann–Whitney U tests. Across the disciplines, the findings revealed that students prefer knowledgeable instructors, practical and relevant learning, authentic assessments, and interactive teaching methods, highlighting a shift toward more engaging and applied learning over traditional lecture- and exam-based approaches in Nepalese higher education. The findings inform improvements to enhance curriculum delivery, assessment practices, technology integration, and teachers' professional development.

Keywords: Assessment types, learning expectations, teacher qualities, teaching style

Introduction

Higher education has experienced significant transformation over the past few decades due to increasing globalization, technological advancement, competition among institutions, and the growing demand for quality educational experiences (Altbach et al., 2019). As universities increasingly focus on improving teaching quality and student satisfaction, understanding students' expectations has become an important aspect of educational planning and service delivery. Expectations refer to beliefs about service delivery that serve as standards or reference points against which actual performance is evaluated (Zeithaml et al., 2018). Therefore, understanding students' expectations, particularly at the undergraduate level where students begin their higher education journey, is essential for designing teaching and learning practices that align with their academic needs and aspirations.

The changing nature of higher education has also introduced market-oriented perspectives where students are increasingly viewed as primary stakeholders and consumers of educational services. European higher education institutions have increasingly recognized students as customers, and students themselves often identify as consumers because they invest substantial time and financial resources in obtaining higher education (Goyzueta Mejía et al., 2025; Azevedo, 2025). This marketisation of higher education has encouraged institutions to move beyond a traditional “inside-out” approach, where institutions assume what students need, toward an “outside-in” approach that systematically explores student expectations and incorporates them into educational delivery (Zeithaml et al., 2018). Consequently, universities have increasingly emphasized enhancing student experiences through improved academic support, relevant information, effective teaching practices, offering personalized guidance, responsive institutional services, and integrating digital tools (Ngo et al., 2025).

Students' expectations are influenced by several factors, including previous educational experiences, social relationships, institutional communication, and information available through various media channels (Tomlinson et al., 2023). These expectations become an important benchmark through which students evaluate their educational experiences and develop perceptions of institutional quality (Ravindran & Kalpana, 2012). According to the Expectation-Confirmation Theory proposed by Oliver (1980), students experience satisfaction when educational experiences meet or exceed their prior expectations, whereas unmet expectations may lead to dissatisfaction. A positive teaching and learning experience contributes to greater student engagement, academic achievement, retention, and supportive intentions toward the institution (Kruja et al., 2021). Therefore, universities need to understand students' expectations, especially during the initial stages of undergraduate education when students may possess expectations that are not entirely aligned with institutional realities (Hassel & Ridout, 2018).

In response to these changing expectations, many universities in developed countries have adopted student-centered teaching approaches that emphasize critical thinking, digital integration, continuous assessment, active learning, and meaningful interaction between students and teachers (Lunevich, 2022; Traxler, 2021). In contrast, higher education

systems in many developing countries continue to face challenges associated with teacher-centered instruction, examination-oriented assessment, rote learning practices, and limited classroom interaction, often influenced by resource limitations and digital inequalities (Ncube & Tawanda, 2025). This difference between evolving student expectations and existing teaching practices creates a significant challenge for universities seeking to provide quality educational experiences.

The issue is particularly important in the context of Nepal, where higher education has expanded considerably with the growth of institutions such as Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu University, Pokhara University, Purbanchal University, Mid-West University, and so on. These institutions serve a diverse undergraduate population and are expected to contribute to national human resource development and socioeconomic progress. Recent higher education reforms and quality assurance initiatives in Nepal have increasingly emphasized improving teaching effectiveness, academic relevance, student engagement, and institutional accountability (Pudasiani, 2025). However, concerns remain regarding traditional teaching practices, inadequate infrastructure, limited educational resources, and the availability of highly qualified academic staff (Timsina et al., 2025).

These concerns have become more evident as Nepal has witnessed a decline in domestic student enrollment alongside a continuous increase in the number of students seeking higher education abroad (Bhatta & Chand, 2026). Although students' decisions to study abroad are influenced by multiple factors, concerns regarding the quality of local institutions, learning environments, and better opportunities in foreign universities remain important considerations (Postiglione, 2011). This situation highlights the need for Nepalese universities to better understand what undergraduate students expect from their teaching methods, assessment systems, classroom environments, and teacher qualities to improve educational experiences and retain students.

Nepal's higher education system is predominantly structured around the university-affiliated college model, unlike the higher education system characterized by autonomous universities. Tribhuvan University, one of the dominant and leading institutions, was established in 1959 and accounts for more than 60 % of all higher education enrollments through its affiliated campuses and constituent colleges (University Grants Commission [UGC], 2024). After the adoption of liberalization and privatization policies of the government in 1990, the education sector has expanded rapidly (Timsina et al., 2025), driven by the growth of private educational institutions offering programs in management, information technology (IT), humanities, social sciences, and so on. The three disciplines (management, IT, and humanities) now account for the largest share of undergraduate enrollment in Kathmandu Valley (UGC, 2024). Despite the substantial growth of educational institutions after the 1990s, the UGC (2024) and the National Planning Commission (NPC, 2024) have consistently noted that growth in institutional numbers is not linearly connected with improvements in teaching quality, faculty qualifications, or learning infrastructure.

In Nepal, undergraduate enrollment has declined in recent years; however, the outward student migration has continued to increase. The data from the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoEST) reveals that students obtaining No Objection Certificate (NOC) for higher education abroad have exceeded 100,000 annually in recent years and reached to 112,593 in fiscal year 2023/24 (MoEST, 2024). This trend indicates a serious concern about the quality, relevance, and attractiveness of educational institutions in Nepal.

Among the multiple factors responsible for these trends, the persistence of traditional teaching, learning, and assessment types has a significant contribution. The report from the World Bank (2021) and the Asian Development Bank (2019) reported that higher education in Nepal is still dominated by the traditional lecturing method and examination-only assessment in Nepali higher education. Furthermore, UNESCO (2022) in their Global Education Monitoring Report claimed that the insufficient teaching quality and pedagogical modernization are the obstacles to higher education, in low- and lower-middle-income countries, including Nepal.

Although previous studies have extensively explored student expectations within Western and student-centered higher education systems (Sander et al., 2000; Money et al., 2017; Kandinko & Mawer, 2013), evidence from developing countries remains limited (Brooks et al., 2021). In particular, undergraduate level students account for 89 % of total enrollment in higher education in Nepal (UGC, 2024), yet existing research has overlooked the students' expectations of teaching and learning for this population despite increasing concerns related to educational quality, student satisfaction, and institutional competitiveness (Upreti, 2023). The prevailing studies have largely examined students' perceptions after they have experienced university education, while limited attention has been given to understanding the expectations that students hold at the beginning of their undergraduate studies. Limited application in higher education pedagogy in Nepal.

To fulfill the empirical and knowledge gap, this study aims to examine the following aspects:

- To examine undergraduate students' expectations regarding teaching and learning practices in higher education.
- To identify preferred assessment methods among undergraduate students.
- To explore the key teacher qualities expected by undergraduate students from the university teachers.

The findings of this study contribute to the existing literature by providing context-specific evidence from Nepal, a developing higher education setting that has received limited scholarly attention, and offer practical insights for universities and policymakers to improve teaching quality, student satisfaction, and the overall higher education experience.

Literature Review

Theoretical and Conceptual Perspectives

Two decades of service quality research in higher education have struggled with definitional inconsistency around the concept of student expectations. In the service marketing literature, expectations are formally defined as predictive beliefs, what a consumer anticipates will occur before a service encounter, rather than what they ideally desire or prefer (Parasuraman et al., 1988; Zeithaml et al., 2018). In the higher education context, students' predictive expectations that are based on what they have experienced in secondary school and their normative expectations, that is, what they believe quality university teaching should involve, frequently diverge considerably, and the gap between these two levels is itself a source of dissatisfaction even before a single lecture is attended (Appleton-Knapp & Krentler, 2006).

The formation of student expectations before entering higher education is best understood through Zeithaml et al. (2018) service expectation framework, which identifies four primary antecedents: personal service needs, prior experience of analogous services, informal word-of-mouth communication, and institutional marketing signals. These formation inputs do not operate uniformly across cultural and educational contexts. In the West, student-centered secondary systems where active learning, critical discussion, and independent project work are normalized, incoming undergraduates arrive with expectations calibrated to participatory teaching (Sander et al., 2000; Crisp et al., 2009). In contrast, students whose secondary education was characterized by teacher authority, rote learning, and examination preparation, as is broadly true in the Nepali and South Asian secondary context (Upreti, 2023), are likely to arrive holding expectations oriented toward structured, expert-led, content-intensive instruction. Neither orientation is educationally superior, but the divergence is consequential for institutions attempting to design teaching environments that satisfy initial expectations.

Oliver's (1980) Expectation-Confirmation Theory (ECT) provides the evaluative mechanism by which students convert their initial expectations into satisfaction or dissatisfaction judgments. At its core, ECT posits that satisfaction is a three-part function: first, students hold prior expectations of a service; second, they perceive the service as it is delivered; and third, they compare the expectation and delivery, generating a disconfirmation signal. When perceived performance exceeds students' expectations, positive disconfirmation occurs, resulting in satisfaction that gradually fosters loyalty, engagement, and continued enrolment (Oliver, 1998). When performance merely meets expectations, students experience a baseline level of satisfaction, leading to continued participation without enhanced engagement. However, when perceived performance falls below the adequate service threshold proposed by Zeithaml et al. (2018), negative disconfirmation occurs, generating dissatisfaction that, when experienced repeatedly across multiple interactions, may lead to student disengagement and early withdrawal (Appleton-Knapp & Krentler, 2006).

Parasuraman et al. (1985, 1988, and 1990) SERVQUAL model complements ECT by shifting the analytical level from individual satisfaction to organizational quality failure. The model proposes that service quality is experienced as a gap between expected and perceived service

(Gap 5) and that this customer-facing gap is caused by four organizational antecedent gaps: management's misperception of customer expectations (Gap 1); failure to translate management perceptions into service specifications (Gap 2); failure to deliver service to specification (Gap 3); and miscommunication of service capability to customers (Gap 4). In the higher education context, Gap 1 is arguably the most consequential: if academic managers and curriculum designers hold systematically inaccurate beliefs about what students expect from teaching, the entire quality assurance chain is compromised. Consequently, no amount of investment in pedagogy, facilities, or assessment design will reliably close Gap 5 if the direction of investment is misaligned with actual student priorities.

The debate on whether students should be considered customers requires critical analysis from multiple perspectives. The student-as-customer approach has its critics, as the commercial framing of education may systematically reshape students' self-conception in pedagogically damaging ways. Naidoo and Jamieson (2005) argue that the marketisation of higher education encourages students to adopt a consumer identity characterized by rights-claiming and service evaluation rather than an academic identity characterized by intellectual challenge, disciplinary enculturation, and scholarly risk-taking. Molesworth et al. (2009) extend this critique empirically by documenting how students increasingly describe their educational goals in terms of credential possession ("having" a degree) rather than intellectual transformation ("being" a learner), a shift they attribute directly to the consumer framing embedded in tuition-fee systems and institutional marketing. However, the appropriate response to this critique is not to abandon expectation measurement but to adopt a co-production framework (Eagle & Brennan, 2007), in which students function simultaneously as customers, co-producers, and beneficiaries of educational quality.

Empirical Evidence on Students' Expectations

Teaching and Learning Approach, Assessment, and Teacher Qualities: Students' expectations of teaching and learning can be discussed from the different components of teaching and learning. Among the most replicable findings in the student expectations literature is the primacy of instructionally engaging, content-rich teaching over passive information transmission. Sander et al. (2000) first documented this in UK undergraduate samples, where students ranked intellectually stimulating lectures, opportunities for discussion, and clear explanatory teaching among the highest-priority expectations. These priorities have been confirmed in subsequent studies across multiple Western national contexts, in Australia (Crisp et al., 2009), the United States (Appleton-Knapp & Krentler, 2006), and across European institutions (Money et al., 2017), establishing a consistent picture in which students at the threshold of higher education desire teaching that challenges them intellectually while remaining accessible and well-structured. The limited available evidence from developing countries in higher education settings suggests that students in these contexts hold expectations that prioritize instructor expertise, content organization, and clear evaluation criteria more heavily than interactive or participatory approaches (Butt & Rehman, 2010; Abdullah, 2006).

Apart from these foundational students' expectations, the broader landscape of higher education has undergone a significant paradigmatic shift in recent decades, transiting from teacher-centered transmission models to more student-centered approaches to teaching and learning (Akosah & Bonney, 2025). The changing dynamics of teaching and learning reflect the growing recognition that learners are active participants in the construction of understanding rather than passive recipients of the knowledge (Alam, 2023). The new paradigm of teaching and learning that emphasizes student-centred learning is now widely endorsed in pedagogical literature and in policy across diverse national systems. This approach emphasizes learner autonomy, collaborative inquiry, and the alignment of instructional design according to the students' prior knowledge, interests, and learning needs (Bhardwaj et al., 2025).

Alongside this shift, assessment practices in higher education have evolved considerably around the world, especially in developed countries, with growing emphasis on assessment for learning rather than merely assessment of learning. Assessment of learning emphasize on use of formative assessment strategies including continuous feedback, peer review, self-assessment, and peer review (Parmigiani et al., 2024). The new assessment practices intend to empower students to monitor their own academic progress rather than just the assessment of learning. The emergence of competency-based education (CBE) has introduced an outcomes-oriented framework; instead of accumulating credit hours to earn a degree, learners advance by demonstrating applied competencies and real-world capabilities (Zaky, 2026; Gervais, 2016). These global trends collectively signal a reconfiguration of student expectations. Students of the 21st century increasingly anticipate not only intellectually engaging content delivery but also participatory learning environments, transparent and developmental assessment practices, and curricula oriented toward demonstrable real-world competencies.

Assessment Preferences: In the Western higher education literature about assessment, students express strong preferences for continuous and formative assessment over terminal examinations, timely and constructive feedback over grades-only returns, and authentic, career-relevant tasks over purely academic exercises (Sander et al., 2000; Money et al., 2017). In South Asia, students conditioned by this system arrive at university with predictive expectations calibrated to examination preparation: clear marking criteria, predictable question formats, and high weighting on memorization of delivered content (Butt & Rehman, 2010).

Teacher Characteristics and Competencies: Across three decades and multiple national contexts, subject knowledge, teaching skill, and enthusiasm for the discipline appear consistently as the highest-ranked teacher qualities expected by students entering higher education (Sander et al., 2000; Appleton-Knapp & Krentler, 2006; Money et al., 2017; Abdullah, 2006). Enthusiasm for the subject, approachability, and organizational competence appear consistently as secondary, but still high-priority attributes (Sander et al., 2000), and their disciplinary weighting differs in theoretically coherent ways. However, in the context of South Asia, students expect teachers to promote meaningful learning interactions and diversified learning strategies as well, along with the fundamental teachers' qualities (Clarkson et al, 2026).

Digital and Technology Expectations: Student technology expectations in the higher education literature were characterized by a preference for blended integration rather than full digital replacement: students expected institutional learning management systems (LMS), digital access to course materials, and responsive online communication with instructors, but retained a strong preference for face-to-face human interaction as the primary teaching modality before 2020 (Money et al., 2017). The COVID-19 pandemic fundamentally disrupted this preference pattern and elevated baseline expectations for digital access, recorded lectures, interactive online platforms, and flexible attendance that have persisted into hybrid learning environments (Zou et al., 2025; Keane et al., 2023).

In developing country higher education contexts, students prioritize instructor authority, content structure, and examination preparation more heavily than their developed-country counterparts, while placing comparatively less weight on student-centered pedagogies, continuous assessment, and institutional support services (Butt & Rehman, 2010; Abdullah, 2006). Students in developing country priorities instructor authority, content structure, and examination preparation more heavily than their developed-country counterparts, while placing comparatively less weight on student-centered pedagogies, continuous assessment, and institutional support services (Butt & Rehman, 2010; Abdullah, 2006).

In the South Asian higher education literature, the specific question of what students expect from teaching and learning, measured before experience and disaggregated by discipline, has received very limited systematic empirical attention in peer-reviewed research from the region. The available evidence is largely drawn from Pakistan (Butt & Rehman, 2010), Malaysia (Abdullah, 2006), Hong Kong (Clarkson et al., 2026), and India (Rani & Rao, 2019). While this body of work is gradually expanding, it remains predominantly focused on student satisfaction with educational services rather than on pre-experience expectations of teaching and learning.

For instance, the UGC (2023) has highlighted the persistent weakness in Nepal's higher education quality assurance system and emphasizes that there is a need for a systematic mechanism to assess the extent to which students' expectations are aligned with institutional teaching and learning practices. The absence of a regulatory framework has amplified the evidential gap in the academic literature, particularly regarding students' expectations and their overall impact on educational experience. Moreover, there is a lack of academic studies to measure first-year students' expectations and the institutional framework to generate evidence of student expectations, which is consequently important to address the unrealistic expectations of the students. The present study intends to address the academic and policy-relevant gap by providing insights with implications from the academic context and policy level for the national quality assurance efforts in higher education.

Research Methods

Study Context

The UGC is the principal body for coordinating and regulating higher education institutions in Nepal under the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MoEST). There are 24

recognized institutions in the higher education system of Nepal, including 17 universities and 7 specialized medical academies accredited by the UGC. Kathmandu serves as the primary hub of higher education activity in Nepal. There are 624 campuses in Bagmati Province, including 44 constituent, 167 community, and 413 private institutions.

Among them, 546 campuses offer undergraduate-level programs in Bagmati Province. According to UGC EMIS data (2023/24), bachelor's students constitute approximately 89.6% with 567,338 students of total higher education enrollment, with master's students accounting for approximately 10% with 63,049 students, and MPhil, PhD, and postgraduate diploma students together comprising less than .5% with 3,165 students' enrollments. (UGC, 2024)

Research Design and Approach

This study employed a descriptive cross-sectional research design using a survey approach to examine undergraduate students' expectations regarding teaching and learning practices, assessment methods, and teacher qualities in higher education institutions within Kathmandu Valley, Nepal.

The target population comprised first-year, first-semester undergraduate students enrolled in Management, Information Technology, and Humanities programs across colleges in Kathmandu Valley. The selected stream ensures broad representation of the undergraduate program enrollment in Nepal, as the three streams collectively account for over 62% (management 44.68%, humanities 11.48%, science & technology 6.93%) of national undergraduate enrollment in the year 2023/2024 (UGC, 2024).

Students from the colleges were selected using a convenience sampling technique in collaboration with participating educational institutions in Kathmandu Valley. Initial contact was made with college administration offices through professional networks and institutional gatekeepers. Following the granting of institutional permission, the researcher administered questionnaires to first-semester undergraduate students during scheduled class sessions to minimize disruption to teaching. Both private affiliated colleges and community colleges were included in the sample to reflect the institutional diversity of higher education in the study.

The sample size was determined in accordance with statistical requirements for the study. Using Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) formula, a minimum sample size of 385 was deemed sufficient for the analytical approach employed. In this study, a total of 693 questionnaires were distributed to the students of participating colleges to ensure comprehensive coverage of the target population. Of these 611 complete and usable responses were retained for analysis, representing a response rate of 88.2%. Incomplete questionnaires were excluded before analysis.

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire adapted from Sander et al. (2000). Before the main survey, the instrument was pilot tested on a separate sample of 45 students to assess reliability and contextual suitability. Cronbach's alpha coefficients exceeded the recommended threshold of .70 for all constructs after the removal of two items with unsatisfactory reliability. Minor modifications were made to selected assessment-related items to ensure relevance to

the academic programs under investigation. The final questionnaire consisted of four sections, including initial expectations, preferred assessment types, preferred teacher qualities, and teaching/learning style preferences.

The survey was conducted between March and April 2025 using an online questionnaire administered through Google Forms. A five-point ranking scale was employed to assess students' preferences regarding teaching and learning approaches, assessment methods, and teacher attributes, where lower mean scores indicate higher levels of preference or importance. The scale ranged from 1 (most preferred) to 5 (least preferred).

Data were screened for completeness before analysis and subsequently analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics 29. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, means, and rankings, were used to summarize students' expectations. The Kruskal–Wallis H test and the Mann–Whitney U test was employed to examine differences in expectations across academic disciplines.

Result and Analysis

Sample Profile and Academic Streams

The study was conducted among undergraduate students from three major academic streams commonly offered in colleges within the Kathmandu Valley: management, information technology (IT), and humanities. The management stream includes students enrolled in BBA, BBM, BBS, BBA-F, and related programs. The IT stream comprises students from BCA, BIT, BIM, and BSc CSIT programs, who are inclined towards computer applications, software development, system development, and emerging technologies. The humanities stream includes students from programs such as BSW and BA, with specializations in psychology, sociology, and anthropology, focusing on social sciences. The distribution of respondents by field of study, along with the data collection timeline, is presented in Table 1.

Table 1
Respondent's Field of Study (Academic Discipline)

Field of Study	Frequency	Questionnaire Administered
Management	215	Induction and First week of teaching
IT	201	Second week of teaching
Humanities	195	Second week of teaching
Total	611	

Initial Expectations of Teaching Learning Practices

Table 2 presents students' initial expectations regarding teaching and learning practices. The summary of statistics of 611 respondents was calculated based on their ranking of expected teaching learning practices; 1 indicating the highest priority and 5 the least priority.

Table 2
Overall Ranking and Non-parametric Comparison of Initial Expectations

Statements	Mean	Friedman Mean Rank	Kruskal- Wallis H (P)	Significant Pairwise Comparisons	<i>p-value</i>
IE 1: Engaging and interactive	1.58	3.12	4.379 (.112)	IE1 vs IE2	p < .001
IE 2: Knowledgeable and well-prepared	1.39	2.77	4.968 (.083)	IE2 vs IE1	p < .001
IE 3: Relevant course content	1.5	2.99	.586 (.746)	IE2 vs IE3	p < .001
IE 4: Timely Feedback	1.55	3.06	1.17 (.557)	IE2 vs IE4	p < .001
IE 5: Participation opportunities	1.53	3.06	.027 (.987)	IE2 vs IE5	p < .001

Among the evaluated aspects, instructor knowledge and preparedness emerged as the most highly prioritized expectation with a mean rank of 2.77, followed by the relevance and practical applicability of course content. Opportunities for active participation, timely feedback, and engaging teaching methods were also considered important, indicating students' preference for a supportive and interactive learning environment.

The results of the Kruskal–Wallis H tests indicate no statistically significant differences in expectations across academic disciplines (Management, Information Technology, and Humanities), suggesting a broadly consistent pattern of expectations among newly enrolled undergraduate students.

Expected or Preferred Assessment Types

In academia, formative and summative assessments are commonly used to measure students' academic progress. Regardless of type, assessment mechanisms are shifting from traditional knowledge reproduction toward evaluating skills such as critical thinking, problem-solving, and self-management. It is important to adopt appropriate assessment mechanisms to measure teaching–learning practices, as they directly influence students' academic experiences (Boud & Falchikov, 2007). In addition, within the changing dynamics of educational settings, understanding the types of assessment students expect may help to better balance needs, requirements, and expectations.

Table 3
Assessment Preferences and Disciplinary Differences

Assessment Types	Mean	Mean Rank	Kruskal-Wallis H	Asymp. Sig.	Key Significant Post-hoc Results (Bonferroni-corrected, $\alpha = .017$)
Research-based work and Presentation	1.76	1	11.054	.004	No significant pairwise differences after correction
Case Study Analysis	1.99	2	9.375	.009	Management > IT ($p = .001$), Management > Humanities ($p = .001$), IT > Humanities ($p = .003$)
Project/Simulation/computing exercise	2.11	3	15.769	.00	IT > Management ($p = .001$), IT > Humanities ($p = .001$), Management vs Humanities: n.s.
Coursework Exam	2.14	4	2.927	.231	No significant differences across disciplines

Note. n.s = not significant

Table 3 ranks assessment preferences from most preferred research-based work, followed by case study analysis, project/simulation/computing exercise, and least preferred coursework exams. Kruskal-Wallis tests showed significant disciplinary differences for case study analysis and project-based exercises ($p < .01$), but not for coursework exams. The result indicates students prefer formative assessment types rather than summative assessments like coursework exams. Post-hoc comparisons revealed that management students preferred case studies more than IT and humanities students, while IT students preferred project-based/computing exercises more than others.

Preference for Teacher Qualities

Teachers in higher education need to excel in teaching learning practices, approaches, and mechanisms to ensure the meaning academic experience for the students. As a practitioner in educational setting, teachers need to have professional qualities and personal attributes for a better learning experience for the students. Apart from the required attributes, it is important to understand the expected teacher qualities from the students' perspectives as well.

Table 4
Teacher Quality Preferences and Disciplinary Differences

Teacher's Qualities	Mean	Rank	Kruskal-Wallis H	Asymp. Sig. (p)	Key Significant Post-hoc Results (Bonferroni-corrected, $\alpha = .017$)
Knowledge	1.52	1	2.141	.343	No significant differences across disciplines
Teaching Skills	1.58	2	3.787	.151	No significant differences across disciplines
Enthusiasm	1.78	3	6.37	.041	No significant pairwise differences after correction ($p > .017$)
Approachableness	1.83	4	5.326	.07	No significant differences across disciplines
Organizing Skills	1.96	5	9.083	.011	Management > IT (U = 18235.5, $p = .003$), Other comparisons: n.s.

Table 4 ranks teacher qualities from most preferred knowledge followed by teaching skills, enthusiasm, approachableness, and least preferred (organizing skills, $M = 1.96$). Kruskal-Wallis tests showed significant disciplinary differences for enthusiasm ($p = .041$) and organizing skills ($p = .011$), but post-hoc comparisons (Bonferroni-corrected) revealed only one significant pairwise difference: management students valued organizing skills more than IT students.

Students' Preference for Teaching Learning Style

The types of teaching learning style/methodologies used have a direct impact on students' academic performance, their level of class engagement, motivation towards learning, and eventually the overall learning experience. In the dynamic education setting, a student-centered approach is prioritized rather than the traditional teacher-centric approach. Aligning the style of teaching with the students' expectations can enhance a better teaching-learning experience for both teacher and students.

Table 5
Teaching–Learning Style Preferences and Group Differences

Style of Teaching Learning	Mean	Rank	Kruskal-Wallis H	Asymp. Sig.	Key Significant Post-hoc Results (Bonferroni-corrected, $\alpha = .017$)
Interactive Lecture	1.7	1	1.796	.407	No significant differences across disciplines
Group Work	1.81	2	8.035	.018	Management > IT (U = 18443, $p = .005$), Other comparisons: n.s.
Role Play	1.9	3	8.347	.015	Management > IT (U = 18397, $p = .005$), Other comparisons: n.s.
Tutorials	1.94	4	4.707	.095	No significant differences across disciplines
Formal Lecture	2.5	5	5.487	.064	No significant differences across disciplines

Table 5 ranks teaching–learning styles from most to least preferred. Interactive lectures ranked highest, followed by group work, role play, tutorials, and formal lectures as the least preferred. KruskalWallis tests revealed significant disciplinary differences for group work and role play. Posthoc comparisons (Bonferroni-corrected) showed that management students preferred both group work and role play significantly more than IT students. No other significant disciplinary differences were found.

Students' Anticipated Preference for Teaching and Learning

The students participating in the study had not yet been exposed to university-level teaching and learning; their pre-university expectations, however, have significant pedagogical implications. Previous research has demonstrated that the students' pre-university expectations have a vital role in shaping their subsequent engagement with university, satisfaction, and retention in higher education (Crisp et al., 2009; Sander et al., 2000). In this context, the students' expectations reported and discussed do not serve as an evaluative judgement of institutional, but rather as anticipatory signals regarding what pedagogical approach facilitates and supports students in the early transaction to university education and their motivation and level of engagement. Thus, the anticipatory preference can be considered as valuable evidence for higher education for aligning undergraduate teaching and learning approaches with incoming undergraduate students.

Table 6
Student anticipated preferences for teaching and learning

Student Anticipation	Mean	Rank	Kruskal-Wallis H	Asymp. Sig.	Key Significant Post-hoc Results (Bonferroni-corrected, $\alpha = .017$)
Experiential and applied learning	1.4	1 st	3.704	.157	No significant differences across disciplines
Technology-enhanced learning environment	1.43	2 nd	2.873	.238	No significant differences across disciplines
Instructors' competence and preparedness	1.48	3 rd	8.27	.016*	IT > Humanities ($p = .006$), Other comparisons: n.s.
Responsive feedback and academic dialogue	1.51	4 th	3.09	.213	No significant differences across disciplines
Peer collaboration and interactive learning	1.52	5 th	.596	.742	No significant differences across disciplines

Table 6 presents student anticipatory expectations of teaching and learning. The incoming students prioritize experiential and applied learning along with a technology-enhanced learning environment, instructor competence, responsive feedback, and collaborative and interactive learning. The very closely aligned mean score across five dimensions informs broadly similar anticipations among incoming students, regardless of the academic discipline, informing the shared aspirational expectations of university-level teaching and learning before the exposure. Kruskal-Wallis test reveals there is a significant disciplinary difference in instructors' competence and preparedness. Posthoc comparisons (Bonferroni-corrected) showed that IT students' notable stronger anticipation regarding instructor competence and preparedness than that of humanities students. It informs the critical role of the instructor in the ever-evolving disciplinary field.

Discussion

This study examined the expectations of newly enrolled undergraduate students in different higher education institutions in Kathmandu Valley regarding teaching and learning practices, assessment methods, teacher qualities, and preferred teaching styles in higher education. Overall, the findings present a clear pattern: students prefer knowledgeable instructors,

relevant and practical learning experiences, authentic assessment methods, and interactive teaching approaches. Across disciplines, students expressed a desire for a more engaging and applied educational experience than the traditional lecture- and examination-oriented model that continues to characterize much of higher education in Nepal. This suggests a gap between students' expectations and the educational practices they commonly encounter, reflecting what SERVQUAL describes as a mismatch between expected and perceived service quality (Parasuraman et al., 1998).

Teaching and Learning Expectations

The findings in regard to teaching and learning expectations showed that instructor knowledge and preparedness were students' highest priorities, followed by the relevance and practical applicability of course content. This suggests that students entering higher education first expect their teachers to be competent, well-prepared, and capable of connecting learning to real-world contexts. This finding is consistent with previous studies conducted in the United Kingdom, Australia, the United States, and Europe, which similarly identified instructor competence as one of the most important student expectations (Sander et al., 2000; Crisp et al., 2009; Appleton-Knapp & Krentler, 2006; Money et al., 2017). The consistency of these findings suggests that instructor expertise is a fundamental expectation across educational contexts. From the perspective of Zeithaml et al.'s (2018) Zone of Tolerance framework, instructor knowledge represents both a desired and a minimum acceptable standard. Consequently, inadequate instructor competence is likely to create dissatisfaction and negative disconfirmation (Oliver, 1980).

Unlike some previous studies that found disciplinary differences in teaching expectations, the present study found remarkable consistency across management, IT, and humanities students. This may reflect the fact that students share similar educational experiences before entering university and therefore develop comparable expectations regardless of their chosen discipline.

Teacher Qualities

Subject knowledge and teaching skills emerged as the most important teacher qualities, followed by enthusiasm, approachability, and organisational skills. This indicates that students view competence and effective teaching ability as the foundation of quality education. Before expecting teachers to be supportive or motivating, students first expect them to possess strong content knowledge and the ability to teach effectively.

These findings align with previous research across different educational contexts (Sander et al., 2000; Appleton-Knapp & Krentler, 2006; Abdullah, 2006; Butt & Rehman, 2010). The consistency across disciplines suggests that knowledge and teaching skills function as threshold qualities rather than desirable extras. Within the SERVQUAL framework, these qualities correspond to the assurance dimension, which reflects competence, credibility, and the ability to inspire confidence (Parasuraman et al., 1988).

Teaching Style Preferences

Interactive lectures were the most preferred teaching style, followed by group work, role play, tutorials, and formal lectures. The large gap between interactive and traditional lectures indicates that students strongly favour active participation over passive learning. Rather than simply receiving information, students appear to want opportunities to discuss, question, and apply what they learn. Disciplinary differences were evident in preferences for group work and role play, with management students valuing these approaches more than IT students. These differences reflect the professional competencies emphasized within each field, highlighting the need for discipline-sensitive teaching strategies rather than a uniform pedagogical approach.

This finding is in line with the evidence supporting student-centred learning approaches (Sander et al., 2000; Money et al., 2017). It also challenges assumptions that students educated within teacher-centred systems necessarily prefer traditional lectures. Although students may expect to encounter lecture-based teaching because of their previous experiences, they clearly do not view it as the ideal learning approach. This distinction between predictive and desired expectations supports the argument of Appleton-Knapp and Krentler (2006).

Students' Anticipated Preference for Teaching and Learning

Students' anticipation of teaching and learning suggests that incoming students expect higher education to provide practical and experiential learning opportunities, technology-supported instruction, competent instructors, timely feedback, and collaborative learning experiences. These expectations reflect a preference for student-centred learning approaches rather than the traditional lecture-based teaching. Similar findings have been reported by Sander et al. (2000), who found that students entering higher education value engaging and practically relevant learning experiences. The strong expectation for technology-enhanced learning also reflects the growing influence of digital technologies on students' educational experiences. While expectations were largely similar across disciplines, IT students placed greater emphasis on instructor competence and preparedness than humanities students. This may be because students in rapidly evolving technical fields rely more heavily on instructors to provide current knowledge and industry-relevant skills.

Conclusion and Implications

This study examined newly enrolled undergraduate students' expectations of teaching-learning practices, assessment methods, and teacher qualities across management, IT, and humanities disciplines. The study showed that the undergraduate students place high value on instructors' subject knowledge, teaching competence, interactive delivery, and practical assessment methods. These expectations were shaped largely by Nepal's secondary education system, where teacher authority and content transmission remain dominant. Consequently, students' expectations were rooted primarily in prior schooling experiences, even as global pedagogy has been shifted toward student-centered approaches.

While communality exists at a broader level, disciplinary differences emerge where management students favor case-based collaborative learning, while IT students prioritize instructor expertise and project-based learning, indicating that course design should reflect disciplinary characteristics rather than a uniform approach. Institutions should therefore emphasize student-centered, technology-supported, practice-oriented teaching, backed by instructors with strong disciplinary and pedagogical competence.

The findings validate the desired-expectations model and ECT beyond developed and commercial settings, establishing empirically grounded baseline evidence of undergraduate students' expectations. This baseline represents the "expectations" component of SERVQUAL Gap 5, serving as a benchmark for evaluating teaching and learning quality against students' post-university perceptions. Likewise, the study validates ECT in a South Asian developing-country context where students socialized in teacher-centered, examination-dominated secondary schooling arrive at university with strong desired-level expectations for interactive instruction, applied assessment, and pedagogically skilled instructors. This pattern is not culturally bounded, since negative disconfirmation occurs wherever perceived service quality falls below desired expectations, regardless of the educational culture that shaped them. Across all three disciplines, the universal demand for skilled, enthusiastic, well-organised instructors makes faculty development an institutional quality lever rather than an optional enrichment activity.

Similarly, the study findings offer a new perspective on Nepal's outward student migration, suggesting it may reflect accumulated negative disconfirmation when domestic institutions fail to meet students' expectations, risking the loss of educational investments and the human capital, innovation, and civic contributions of a generation of students. This is especially relevant to Nepal's National Education Policy, which advocates student-centred pedagogy, competency-based curricula, and diversified assessment, as the study shows that demand-side conditions for such reforms already exist and students' expectations closely align with policy goals, leaving the challenge on the supply side, where institutional capacity, faculty preparedness, and learning infrastructure remain insufficient. These findings also carry implications for the University Grants Commission's quality assurance and accreditation processes and for the MoEST professional development priorities, suggesting that minimum standards for pedagogical diversity, assessment practices, and teaching competence should be incorporated as measurable benchmarks grounded in empirically established student expectations, rather than as merely aspirational goals.

Limitations and Future Research

The use of convenience sampling, focused exclusively on private colleges in Kathmandu Valley across three disciplines, limits generalizability to students in public universities or institutions outside the capital, who may hold different expectations. Additionally, the cross-sectional, pre-experience design captures only desired-level expectations rather than perceived service quality after actual teaching encounters, leaving full SERVQUAL Gap 5 analysis beyond the study's scope, while the self-report ranking scale also carries response bias risks.

Future research should use a longitudinal, matched-pair design measuring expectations at enrolment and perceived quality after the first academic year to enable full SERVQUAL Gap 5 analysis and rigorously test the ECT disconfirmation hypothesis in Nepal. Comparative studies spanning public universities and private colleges across provinces beyond Kathmandu Valley, using qualitative or mixed methods, would further test the generalizability of these findings across Nepal's diverse higher education landscape.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to express their sincere gratitude to all the individuals (students) and institutions whose support, guidance, and contributions made the successful completion of this research article possible. Their valuable assistance throughout the research process significantly enhanced the quality and rigor of this study.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

Funding


There was no external source of funding for the research.

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Cite as: Thapa, D., & Kandel, Y. (2026). Undergraduate students' expectations of teaching and learning: A multi-stream analysis in higher education. *Journal of Innovation in Academia*, 5(1), 23-46. <https://doi.org/10.32674/s18pfz27>

Note: The authors acknowledge the use of AI-assisted tools, including generative AI applications, solely for language editing, grammar checking, readability enhancement, and the organization of ideas during manuscript preparation. No AI tools were used for data collection, data analysis, interpretation of findings, or the generation of original scientific content. The authors take full responsibility for the accuracy and integrity of the manuscript.