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‘You teach it, and then I go off and try to soak it all up’: A qualitative investigation of first year student expectations during transition

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Abstract

Student expectations are an important factor affecting successful transition to higher education. Expectations of the wider university experience have been well researched, however learning and teaching specific expectations require further exploration in order to facilitate achievement, satisfaction and retention. The aim of this qualitative study was to understand first year student expectations of learning and teaching when transitioning to university. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with twelve first-year Sport Rehabilitation students. Data were analysed using thematic analysis and four key themes identified: student responsibility, the classroom, learning beyond the classroom, and transition. Students expect learning within the classroom to be largely passive, but expect to take responsibility for their learning outside of the classroom and adopt an active approach to developing understanding. Family, peers, previous educators, social media, and room layout contributed towards informing expectations. These insights will enable programme teams to provide informed support for students in reframing their expectations to align with the realities of university study and contemporary learning theory. Future research should explore expectations of learning and teaching across other disciplines, and investigate the effectiveness of interventions that work to align student expectations with the realities of study on university programmes.

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Introduction

Transition to higher education (HE) is a significant period of change that is considered challenging for both students and the academic staff involved in teaching them (Crisp et al., 2009; Hassel & Ridout, 2018). The transition period spans beyond traditional induction, also including pre-entry interventions and the first semester or year of learning. When transitions are poorly managed, it can result in distress for students and decreased academic performance (Hassel & Ridout, 2018; Rowley et al., 2008). Students are also at the greatest risk of withdrawal during this period, therefore enhancing the transition experience is widely considered a priority (Thomas, 2013) and student expectations are an important factor.

Expectations are complex constructs that have been identified as a key factor in the successful transition to HE (Smith & Wertlieb, 2005; Tomlinson et al., 2023). They focus on predictions, rather than hopes and desires, and are said to be shaped by experiences prior to degree commencement (Yale, 2019). It has been suggested that "in the same way beauty is in the eye of the beholder, expectations are in the eye of the student" (Lobo & Gurney, 2014, p. 730), which adds to their complexity. Given that the successful widening participation agenda has contributed towards university student cohorts that are more diverse than ever, a variation of expectations exist that require exploration (Yale, 2019).

It is acknowledged that forming accurate expectations is challenging for students and meeting them is no small feat for institutions. Previous literature has highlighted that student expectations of HE can be unrealistic, and present idealised notions rather than accurate realities (Keup, 2007; Tomlinson et al., 2023). This is highlighted in the 2022 Student Academic Experience Survey, with only one-in-ten students reporting an experience that matched their expectations (Neves & Brown, 2022). The mismatch between student expectations and reality often relates to learning and teaching factors such as study support and teaching quality, which are important to understand as they have the potential to result in confusion, lack of commitment and attrition (Lowe & Cook, 2003; Neves & Stephenson, 2023; Smith & Wertlieb, 2005).

The Expectancy-Disconfirmation Model has been previously used within the literature to describe the important relationship between student expectations, performance (reality), and satisfaction (Appleton-Knapp & Krentler, 2006; Oliver, 1980). When reality exceeds expectations, positive disconfirmation and subsequent satisfaction occurs, however when reality fails to meet expectations, negative disconfirmation and subsequent dissatisfaction occurs (Schwarz & Zhu, 2015). The early concept of the 'freshman myth' highlights similar theoretical connections, linking expectation fulfilment with success, and expectation disillusionment with negative outcomes (Keup, 2007; Stern, 1966). Further to dissatisfaction and general negative outcomes, unmet expectations have been reported to contribute towards disengagement, and subsequent detrimental effects on performance, development, and retention (Hassel & Ridout, 2018; Keup, 2007; Lobo & Gurney, 2014; Lowe & Cook, 2003). Outcomes influenced by expectations such as these are particularly important in the United Kingdom (UK) context given their influence on National Student Survey (NSS) scores. The NSS is completed annually by all publicly funded universities to assess student satisfaction with various aspects of university life, with higher scores thought to signal quality and attract prospective students (Lenton, 2015). Recruitment is a priority given the financial challenges currently facing the UK HE sector (PwC, 2024). Therefore, the

potential impact of expectations on factors affecting recruitment such as the NSS, highlights the value in their consideration.

It has been suggested that universities should be more proactive in responding to discrepancies between student expectations of university, the realities of what is expected of them, and what they will experience (Hassel & Ridout, 2018). However, support provision is only possible if institutions have an adequate awareness and understanding of initial student expectations. If little support is provided to manage expectations, students are likely to maintain previous experiences as their point of reference, which are unlikely to align with the scope of a particular programme or institution (Yang et al., 2020). This can be particularly problematic for healthcare programmes such as Sport Rehabilitation that often have little introduction throughout pre-university education, resulting in transitioning students with limited previous experience on which to base expectations.

Student expectations of the wider university experience have been well researched, particularly in the form of surveys (Brinkworth et al., 2009; Crisp et al., 2009; Hassel & Ridout, 2018; Pather & Dorasamy, 2018; Sander et al., 2000; Scutter et al., 2011). Sections relating to learning and teaching can be found within this wider literature, however studies specifically investigating expectations of learning and teaching are limited. A synthesis of the quantitative learning and teaching specific data within expectations literature noted that students have high expectations around attendance that often do not reflect reality, somewhat unrealistic expectations of teaching staff, uncertainty around learning management, and expectations of learning and teaching with limited alignment to current best practice (Tomlinson et al., 2023). A qualitative exploration of student expectations is required to gain a greater depth of insight into the views and perceptions of students as they transition to university. By providing students with the opportunity to communicate their expectations in depth, educators will be better informed to construct conversations that work towards expectations that best align with a particular programme during transition (Crisp et al., 2009; Lobo & Gurney, 2014). This study is framed within the context of Sport Rehabilitation. Sport Rehabilitation is a healthcare profession regulated by the British Association of Sport Rehabilitators (BASRaT) that focuses on neuromusculoskeletal injury assessment, management, and prevention. It requires students to possess high-level theoretical knowledge and extensive clinical and exercise skills in order to qualify and register to practice. Given the engagement required to develop these high-level skills, understanding factors affecting engagement such as expectations is beneficial in facilitating the success and retention of students studying Sport Rehabilitation or similar programmes. Therefore, the aim of this study was to understand first year student expectations of learning and teaching when transitioning to university and addresses the following research question:

What do first year Sport Rehabilitation students expect of learning and teaching at university?

Method

Study Design

A qualitative approach using semi-structured interviews was used to gain an in-depth understanding of first-year Sport Rehabilitation student expectations of learning and teaching during transition to university. Interviews were deemed the most appropriate method of data collection given their ability to capture individual beliefs, perceptions, and the experiences informing them, which participants may not feel comfortable to share within a focus group (Hennink et al., 2020). This study was situated within a critical realist paradigm, endorsing a judgemental rationality that encourages and permits real-world impact (Wiltshire, 2018). As experienced educators, the authors were aware of the impact their subjective perspectives around student expectations may have on this qualitative research process. In order to reduce potential bias, authors engaged in personal reflexivity in the form of reflexive discussions during both development and undertaking of the project (Olmos-Vega et al., 2023). Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the university Research Ethics Committee [FHS455].

Participants

A purposive sampling method was used to recruit 12 participants (Hennink et al., 2020). This was deemed appropriate as literature on sample size within qualitative research has reported evidence of data saturation at between six and 12 interviews (Boddy, 2016). The notion of information power or richness was also considered, and authors were prepared to recruit additional participants if necessary to ensure meaningful findings (Braun & Clarke, 2022). To be eligible for the study, participants had to be members of a first-year Sport Rehabilitation cohort who commenced study in 2022 at a University in the north of England. All students were verbally invited to participate by a member of the research team during programme induction, and those who expressed interest received participant and consent information via email. All students were eligible to participate, providing they had no previous experience of university education.

Participants were made aware that involvement was voluntary and would not affect their programme grades. They were also made aware that they could withdraw from the study without reason up to the point of data analysis, and that their interview data would be anonymised.

Data Collection

Data were collected through one-to-one, face-to-face, semi-structured interviews. A bespoke interview guide was developed using guidance for interviewing in education research (Atkins & Wallace, 2012; Brooks et al., 2018), whilst taking influence from the findings of Tomlinson et al. (2023). The interview guide was designed to be used flexibly, allowing the interviewer the freedom to be somewhat guided by participant responses and probe or prompt where necessary. The interview guide can be seen in Table 1.

Interviews took place in a university meeting room at a time convenient to each participant and were conducted by the first author, a university lecturer experienced in qualitative research methods. In order to promote accurate responses to questioning, each interview began by clarifying that when asking about expectations, the researcher was referring to participant

predictions, and when asking about hopes, they were referring to participant preferences and desires. Inspired by the free listing activities used within qualitative research, participants were then provided with a pen and paper and given two minutes to write down anything that came to mind when thinking about learning and teaching expectations. This data was not used for analysis, but was intended as an elicitation technique and a prompt to be used throughout the interview (Keddem et al., 2021). Prompts such as “can you tell me more about this” were used throughout the interview, along with explanations where necessary. Each interview was audio recorded and transcribed verbatim into Microsoft Word by the first author to facilitate data familiarisation. Following transcription, interviews were cross checked for accuracy by the second author and anonymised. Each participant was assigned a number and made aware that this is how they would be referred to throughout the data.

The authors were mindful of the potential for a feeling of power imbalance between lecturer and student, and took steps to minimise this as suggested by Atkins & Wallace (2012). Interviews were conducted during induction week, before a formal lecturer-student relationship had been established. They were also conducted with neither individual sitting behind a desk, chairs arranged to avoid intensity, and using opening questions to put participants at ease.

Data Analysis

Following transcription, an inductive reflexive thematic analysis was conducted within NVivo qualitative data analysis software following the six-phase process described by Braun & Clarke (2021). This form of analysis was chosen due to its flexibility, ability to interpret various aspects of a topic, and lack of need for a pre-existing theoretical framework, making it suitable for a relatively under researched area (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Phase one, data familiarisation, involved an iterative process of reading and re-reading the data whilst noting down ideas for coding. Phase two, generating initial codes, involved organising data into meaningful groups. Phase three, searching for themes, involved combining codes to form potential themes. Phase four, reviewing themes, involved quality checking to ensure that all data within a theme formed a coherent pattern that accurately represented the data. Phase five, defining and naming themes, involved ensuring that themes have a clear focus, don’t overlap, and are relevant. And phase six, producing the report, involved telling the story of the data in an analytical way with specific relation to the research question. Compelling verbatim quotes that accurately represented the data were also selected during this phase in order to amplify the participant voice and add authenticity. Phases one and two were completed by the first author, all other phases were completed by both authors.

Terminology

Throughout the study, the researchers and participants use educational terms that are specific to a UK context and may lack universal application. For clarity, A-level and level three vocational qualifications are qualifications that enable entry into HE settings, typically occurring at a college or sixth-form centre as pre-university institutions. The participants and authors also refer to further education (FE), which in the UK context describes post-16, pre-university education.

Table 1

Interview Guide

Opening	Could you start by telling me what made you want to come to university?
	Where do you see yourself working in the future?
Main	How do you expect to be taught at university? What methods do you expect will be used?
	What are your expectations of pre-session work?
	What are your expectations around attendance?
	What would you class as additional study and what are your expectations around this?
	Who do you expect to be responsible for managing learning and why?
	What are your expectations around access to resources?
	Do you have any other expectations of learning and teaching that you can tell me about? [refer them to their notes]
	Can you tell me what you think have been the main contributors to forming your expectations about university learning and teaching?
	What do you hope learning and teaching will be like at university?
	Can you describe your ideal lesson?
Closing	What was your route to university?
	Are you the first person in your immediate family to attend university?
	Which age bracket do you fit into? ○ 18-21 ○ 22-30 ○ 31-40 ○ 41-50 ○ 51-60
	Is there anything else you would like to add or ask me about?

Results

A total of 12 participants consented to taking part in this study and completed interviews lasting approximately 30 minutes. Data collected were considered rich enough to produce meaningful findings, and as such, no additional participants were recruited. One participant was aged between 22-30 years, whilst all others were aged between 18-21 years. Two were the first in their immediate family to attend university. Prior to university, five participants had completed A-Level qualifications and seven had completed level three vocational qualifications. Participants had chosen to attend university for a variety of reasons, including family encouragement, enjoyment

of education, job prospects, and to move away from home. Future aspirations included further study, clinical work, and working in sport. Demographic details such as age are not reported alongside direct quotations due to the small cohort size and risk of identification.

Reflexive thematic analysis of interview data led to four themes which summarise meaningful perspectives and help make sense of first-year student expectations of learning and teaching: student responsibility, the classroom, learning beyond the classroom, and transition.

'Nobody else is going to force me to do it' - Student Responsibility

This theme reflects participant awareness of their learning responsibilities, particularly around seeking support, remaining motivated, and managing their own learning.

Participants were confident that adequate learning support would be available at university, but demonstrated an expectation that it would be their responsibility to reach out and actively seek this support. There was a view that teaching staff would not be openly offering support, or asking students if they need help. One participant summarised:

'I think I'll get whatever support I ask for here, but I won't if I don't ask for it' (Participant 4).

The expectation that students would need to be self-motivated with regards to their learning was clear among participants. This seemed to be fuelled by the fact that it was their choice to study a particular course at university, and would therefore not be chased by teaching staff or forced to complete work. There was an understanding that effort and focus would be required, along with a need to 'apply yourself' and a sense that *'the more you put in, the more you get out'* (Participant 2). Participants also recognised the impact a lack of motivation and responsibility may have on their education:

'If I don't put in the effort, I won't get the grades I need to go into the second year and then eventually get the degree itself. And nobody else is going to force me to do it.' (Participant 5)

A shift in learning management responsibility from teacher to student was expected, with regular use of the term 'independent'. Participants provided specific examples of this responsibility and independence, highlighting that they *'won't be told everything'* (Participant 6), and would need to check Canvas [Virtual Learning Environment], prepare for sessions, write down questions, and consolidate knowledge. They did however, indicate that despite having to take responsibility for managing their learning, teaching staff also have an important role in ensuring that students are guided appropriately and are not overloaded with work. Being independent in learning was important from the participant perspective as it meant they would develop skills in locating resources and not have to rely on others. For example:

'It's [being independent in learning] very helpful, because then we don't have to rely on you [the lecturer] as much' (Participant 3).

To manage their learning, participants noted the importance of using diaries to ensure they were meeting workload deadlines and avoiding the stress that can come from a sense of falling behind with tasks. However, managing their own learning was still expected to be a difficult task due to the volume of lessons and associated work, the desire to participate in societies and clubs, and being away from the encouragement of parents. Despite expected difficulty, participants were

confident that they would be able to manage if they applied themselves and established a routine. However, they did acknowledge that this would require a settling in period:

'I'm sure you'll get into a routine of getting everything into place, but until then you've got to try and move stuff around and try to find a way that works best for you.' (Participant 3)

'They'll speak at me, and I'll write the notes down and leave' - The Classroom

This theme reflects participant expectations and hopes relating to learning and teaching within the classroom, particularly during lectures and practical sessions.

When thinking about teaching sessions overall, participants expected large amounts of content delivered mainly face-to-face, with most expecting that they would attend all scheduled sessions, but some noting that this would not always be necessary if the session was recorded. Participants expected engagement from the other students within sessions, referring to contributing answers to questions and *'having a go at whatever the task is'* (Participant 1). The use of PowerPoint was specifically highlighted in relation to classroom teaching, as well as a mixture of group and independent work. Participants expected group work to be particularly valuable:

'I feel like one of the best ways to learn is exchanging knowledge with your peers. If someone doesn't understand, someone else can explain, and that person will also understand it better as a result of explaining it' (Participant 9)

Participants spoke regularly about lectures, and seemed to have the most extensive expectations in this area. They expected lectures to be fast paced and technical, with no time to revisit content from previous sessions. Participants described a lecturer stood at the front or walking up and down talking, whilst students are sat listening and taking notes. One participant summarised:

'I'll bring my laptop or notepad, they'll [the lecturer] speak at me, and I'll write the notes down and leave' (Participant 10).

Participants expanded upon their expectations of note taking to highlight that they would need to decide which information was key, and condense it before writing it down. The purpose of this being to revisit the notes and develop an understanding after the session, rather than to develop an understanding within the session itself.

In addition to taking notes, participants were confident that they would be able to ask questions during or at the end of lectures, and also expected to be asked questions by the lecturer. Some suggested that there may be opportunities for discussion or reflection, but were largely in agreement that sessions would primarily involve listening.

Perceived benefits of lectures as a method of learning and teaching were reported, with participants suggesting that they are useful for larger groups of students where it may be unmanageable to involve all, and that they are a good way to start learning complex concepts before trying to apply the information. Drawbacks of lectures were also reported, mainly around concentration and focus, with participants acknowledging that they would only be able to maintain this for a short period and would struggle to retain information:

'If someone is just talking, it goes in one ear and out the other. It doesn't sit in my head' (Participant 7)

Enjoyment was expected to be limited in a lecture lacking interactivity, with one participant reporting that they would *'get sick of it [lectures] pretty early'* (participant 10) and others suggesting that it would make them less likely to attend. Having the ability to access recordings of lectures was suggested as a method to combat issues with focus and enjoyment, as students would be able to replay, pause, and make additional notes on the session afterwards at their own leisure.

Practical sessions in smaller groups were expected to be used for application of theoretical knowledge. Participants expected *'a lot of practical'* (Participant 1) and were excited about the prospect of this method of learning and teaching. With regards to the running of practical sessions, participants expected tasks or skills to be demonstrated, followed by a period of practice time in a small group or pair where the lecturer would be walking around the room and on hand to help.

As well as expectations, participants described what they hoped learning and teaching within the classroom would be like at university. It was hoped that sessions would involve short breaks to help maintain focus, and also give opportunities for questions, reflection, and talking to peers. One participant specifically wanted lecture style sessions with little interaction to ensure that they could receive the maximal amount of information possible, however all others valued student engagement, and hoped that lectures would involve fun tasks, demonstrations, discussion, and opportunities to test their knowledge:

'I think I would like something that allows us to engage with the lesson, not just sitting down for two hours in silence like robots' (Participant 9)

'It's all about pre-planning' - Learning Beyond the Classroom

This theme reflects participant expectations around the completion of learning activities outside of the classroom, both before and after scheduled teaching sessions.

Pre-session work was expected by all participants, with many expressing the value this would add to their learning. Participants highlighted that entering a session equipped with prior knowledge would enable them to *'get the most out of it [a session]'* (Participant 2), and facilitate a better understanding of topics overall. They also saw value in being able to prepare appropriate questions in advance, as this may be more difficult during sessions due to prioritising note taking. Some participants suggested that that pre-session work would involve the completion of learning tasks assigned by the lecturer, whilst others suggested that this would be driven more by their own initiative and a desire to *'make sessions easier'* (Participant 10).

Post-session work was also expected by participants, including revision and expansion of content through further study. Participants saw the value of repetition and application in consolidating knowledge, particularly in weaker areas:

'You've got to go back and revise and apply it to pieces of work…If it's something that you've not done to a level that you're happy with, you could have a look at doing it again or figuring out if there's another way of doing said thing' (Participant 11)

Participants discussed searching for further information in areas they were struggling to understand, and delving more deeply into topics for additional learning:

'I would assume we would go over not the basics, but the overview of the entire topic, and then we would go home and study it further so we understand it better' (Participant 1)

The expectation of a passive, teacher-centred learning experience was eluded to within responses, largely directed towards theoretical content. For example, participants referenced being taught within a session, but learning or studying afterwards, for example: *'You [the lecturer] teach it and then I go off and try to soak it all up'* (Participant 3). Set post-session tasks were not mentioned within any responses, the sole focus was self-directed revision and further study.

Participants highlighted a variety of methods that they expected to use to aid their learning beyond the classroom, the main being reading. This included reading research articles as well as books, which they expected to be guided towards via a reading list or recommendations in sessions, and to be able to access through the university library. Session notes were expected to be a useful revision tool, specifically the processes of reorganising them and filling in gaps, in addition to reading them. Participants suggested that the internet would be a tool they would use for further study, however different levels of understanding were evident, with some suggesting that they would use Google to provide information, and others acknowledging that the internet should be used carefully as it can produce inaccurate material. Group work was expected to be a useful study method outside of the classroom for both theoretical and practical content, for example combining resources or refining practical skills.

Overall, participants demonstrated an expectation that the study activities taking place outside of the classroom would contribute significantly to their learning. The importance of having a structure and plan to manage their studies was identified, with participants seeing this as a vital tool to ensure they are prepared for sessions, stay up to date, and retain information.

'It's all about pre-planning. If you pre-plan, you don't need to overthink. You know what you are doing' (Participant 7)

'I've seen videos of lecturers pointing at boards and talking a lot' - Transition

This theme presents expectations around the transition from FE to HE. Specifically, the factors that have influenced expectations during the transition period, and comparisons to pre-transition study at FE institutions.

Family and friends appeared to have the largest influence on university learning and teaching expectations. Participants reported being told that university would be a busy time due to the heavy study and assessment load, in addition to enjoying sport and social activities. They were also told that teaching sessions would be very content heavy and require preparatory work.

College and sixth form tutors were also perceived to have had an impact on participant expectations of university level study. Participants were told that university would be a *'massive jump'* (Participant 6) from FE, including a higher workload requiring more independent study with less support. Passive teaching sessions in large groups and large rooms were a key focus, with one participant noting:

'They [college tutors] said that in lessons you sit, the lecturers talk to you and you just kind of write down what you hear. They say if you miss something, it's [the information] not given to you, that's your fault you've missed it' (Participant 6)

Participants described how their expectations had been influenced by the amount and layout of lecture halls, specifically the lectern at the front with many rows facing forwards, giving the impression that lessons will involve looking at the staff member and listening to them speaking.

Social media was also viewed as influencing expectations of what studying at university would be like, particularly for students who transitioned to HE directly from leaving sixth-form or college. Participants reported watching videos of lecturers teaching and students talking about university life, stating that social media would be their *'first port of call'* (Participant 7) if they wanted to learn more about university:

'I've seen videos of lecturers pointing at boards and talking a lot, so It's put it in my head that that's how it's going to be' (Participant 7)

There were a number of expected differences between FE and HE. In relation to content, participants expected university to be more demanding, in depth, and delivery to be at a faster pace. Some thought that teaching methods were likely to be similar, whilst others expected *'less interaction, and just more teaching and explanation'* (Participant 4). They also expected larger group sizes, and thought this may result in sessions being harder to follow. Participants seemed unsure around the amount of learning and teaching support available in comparison to FE. Some expected more subject specific support given the dedicated module leader, but others expected less given the large numbers and multiple year groups.

Discussion

The aim of this study was to understand first-year Sport Rehabilitation students' expectations of learning and teaching when transitioning to university. This is important because in attempting to understand these expectations, educators will be better informed to support students in reframing their expectations to align with both the realities of study on a particular programme and contemporary learning theory. Subsequently, improving students' sense of inclusion, wellbeing, belonging, satisfaction, overall experience, and ultimately promoting retention. The findings of this study indicate that students expect learning within the classroom to be largely passive, involving either listening and notetaking or watching and copying. Outside of the classroom, they expect to take responsibility for their own learning and adopt a more active approach in order to develop knowledge and understanding. Family, peers, FE tutors, social media, and room layout were all reported to have informed these expectations, and fed anticipation of greater independence in learning at university.

This study has three main contributions to make to the academic conversation around first year student expectations of learning and teaching in a higher education context.

Firstly, this study found that students expect learning and teaching within the classroom to be what would largely be termed as passive. Students as passive receivers of knowledge is based on historical notions of learning theory, often realised as the 'jug and mug' theory in which students are the empty mug waiting to be filled with knowledge from the educator's jug, and further theorised in behaviourist and objectivist approaches that promote surface level learning (Biggs & Tang, 2011; Rogers & Freiberg, 1994). Learning theory has progressed towards constructivist approaches in which students are engaged in active learning that encourages them to build

deeper understanding around existing knowledge, however findings here would suggest that student expectations remain largely passive (Biggs & Tang, 2011). For example, whilst they did mention working with peers, competing tasks, and answering questions in relation to teaching sessions in general, they were unclear as to what type of session this may fit within. The clearest expectations were around listening and notetaking in lectures, or watching and repeating in practical sessions, both suggesting that theoretical knowledge and practical skills will be directly provided for students to memorise and copy.

Similar findings have been reported previously, whereby students have indicated that they expect transmissive methods such as lectures to be the main form of learning and teaching used in HE, alongside a misconception that lectures will provide all knowledge relating to a specific topic (Loughlin & Lindberg-Sand, 2023; Sajjad, 2010; Tomlinson et al., 2023). Students in this study acknowledge that they would find it difficult to maintain attention within the traditional lecture, which supports literature suggesting that student attention declines after 10-15 minutes of listening, however challenges more recent findings suggesting that student attention rises and lapses throughout a session, and can be influenced by the flair of the educator, rather than solely the method itself (Bradbury, 2016; Bunce et al., 2010). Interactive, student-centred pedagogies are a way to maximise student attention and engagement, which were hoped for by the students interviewed here, indicating that they would like to be taught using a range of methods.

Methods based on constructivist principles such as team-based learning can be seen as an antidote to passive learning, in that students cannot be passive if engaged in an active teaching method (Hrynchak & Batty, 2012; Sisk, 2011). The social nature of constructivist approaches has also been found to promote feelings of belonging, inclusivity, and contribute to improved attendance, all of which have a positive impact on student retention (Cagliesi & Ghanei, 2022; Hrynchak & Batty, 2012). Pedagogic approaches will vary based on discipline requirements and individual lecturer preferences, with didactic approaches such as the lecture still utilised and appropriate within many disciplines (Loughlin & Lindberg-Sand, 2023; Schmidt, 2015). This is somewhat relevant in the sport rehabilitation context, whereby lectures can be used to deliver factual information and support the large amounts of practical learning. Importantly, the healthcare nature of the programme means that students are required to maintain evidence-informed practice throughout their career, therefore it is imperative that they are also regularly engaged in active pedagogies such as case-based and collaborative learning, that will develop their criticality, independence, and applied skills. Incorporating elements of a negotiated curriculum, whereby students and educators collaborate on developing elements of learning within a module, could also be an excellent opportunity to work with student expectations where appropriate, and further promote an active approach within the classroom by enhancing a sense of relevance, purpose and value for students (Guadalupe & Curtner-Smith, 2020).

The proportionate use of passive methods such as the lecture remains valuable, particularly for large cohorts of students, but perhaps attention could be given to reimagining the traditional lecture, and making the most of all that it has the potential to be. For example, progressing towards interactivity and variety appropriate to the programme and module of study, with this interaction going beyond the raise of a hand to agree or disagree with a given point, and working towards incorporating both individual and small group tasks, small group discussions, and opportunities for question and answer (Loughlin & Lindberg-Sand, 2023; Schmidt et al., 2015;

Tormey & Henchy, 2008; Yhnell & Francis, 2023). Consideration should also be given to the level of inclusivity demonstrated when lecture use is essential, for example ensuring the opportunity for playback, reflecting diversity, and being mindful of accessibility to account for the variation within contemporary cohorts.

The second contribution this study makes to the academic conversation around the learning and teaching expectations of Sport Rehabilitation students during transition to HE is the view that outside of taught sessions, they expect to take active approaches to learning. For example, they expect to complete pre-session work and prepare questions in advance of sessions, and complete further study and application tasks after sessions. Students also expect to have to seek support should they require it and take responsibility for their own learning, acknowledging that this will require a degree of self-motivation. Motivation is often something students find challenging during transition from FE to HE, and is important given the potential impact on educational outcomes and retention (Hockings et al., 2018; Kyndt et al., 2015; Rump et al., 2017). Motivation has been found to significantly impact self-monitoring (cognitive processes associated with learning), which in turn significantly impacts self-management (contextual processes associated with learning), presenting three interrelated dimensions that ultimately contribute towards self-directed learning (Garrison, 1997; Zhu & Doo, 2022). For this reason, enhancing student motivation should be a key focus for educators (Zhu & Doo, 2022). Need-supportive teaching has been identified as a way to achieve this, whereby staff provide autonomy support, structure, and involvement in order to build quality relationships that encourage intrinsic motivation, in addition to external motivators such as deadlines and grades that are often easier to follow (Leenknecht et al., 2023). Such initiatives are likely to be particularly successful in programmes such as Sport Rehabilitation, given the close staff/student relationships that are often formed as a result of high levels of 'hands-on' practical learning**.**

Despite acknowledging that it would be difficult, students in this study expected that they would be able to manage their own learning providing they established a routine. This could prove to be more challenging than expected, given that time management is often poor in students transitioning to HE (Christine et al., 2013; Lowe & Cook, 2003 van der Meer et al., 2010). It has been suggested that being able to manage one's time is foundational to success in the first-year of university study and is directly related to discipline specific competency acquisition, as well as being identified by students themselves as a desired area for support (Christine et al., 2013; Krause & Coates, 2008; Lowe & Cook, 2003). Various barriers to effective time management have been identified, including the volume of subject content, lack of reminders from academic staff regarding deadlines and tasks, and non-academic commitments (van der Meer et al., 2010; Wolters & Brady, 2020). The current cost of living must also be acknowledged, causing significant financial pressures on students and forcing many to maintain paid employment alongside study (Neves & Stephenson, 2023). Whilst some suggest that time management is purely a student responsibility, the authors here and others argue that institutions have an important role to play in developing skills that promote autonomy, such as developing a study routine and managing workload (van der Meer et al., 2010).

The students interviewed here expected that the development of knowledge and understanding would occur beyond the classroom, given that learning within the classroom would primarily involve the passive acquisition of information. This is a bold and interesting expectation given that

independent learning is challenging for, and often poorly understood by students, with many reporting uncertainties around what and how they are supposed to be studying (Christie et al., 2013; Hockings et al., 2018). Whilst it is not necessarily realistic for students to expect that development of understanding is reserved for outside the classroom, independent learning remains an essential skill to develop given the autonomous nature of university study. Previous studies have reported that students expect independent learning to be similar to the teacher set homework tasks they would complete at school or college, and struggle with the motivation required to complete independent learning at university when they know there will be no lecturer follow up (Christie et al., 2013; Hockings et al., 2018). First-year students in particular often favour low level reinforcement and preparation skills associated with surface level learning, such as watching lecture recordings, reading, quizzes, worksheets, and rehearsal, which may be due to an initial focus on learning for exam success (Hockings et al., 2018). The students in this study presented similar expectations, focusing on reading, revising lecture notes, and practicing in groups as their main methods of learning beyond the classroom. One way to address this within the classroom could be through the use of informed learning, an inclusive pedagogical construct aimed at developing students' information literacy whilst simultaneously attending to subject specific content and considering their perspectives and experiences (Bruce & Hughes, 2010; Maybee et al., 2013). Staff should also guide students towards higher-level independent study tasks that focus on extension and application and promote deeper learning. Following up as part of a short task within the next teaching session may also be useful in aiding motivation, providing further guidance to students who need it and continuing the dialogue around methods of independent study.

It should be noted that students tend to overestimate the amount of independent study they will complete at university, with various studies highlighting the mismatch between expectations and experiences (Brinkworth et al., 2009; Maloshonok & Terentev, 2017; Pather & Dorasamy, 2018). This mismatch is important, as it has the potential to negatively impact the transition period, student outcomes and retention (Brinkworth et al., 2009; Maloshonok & Terentev, 2017; Pather & Dorasamy, 2018). Whilst full analysis of the reasons for this mismatch are beyond the scope of this discussion, background and motivational variables have been presented as possible explanations (Maloshonok & Terentev, 2017). It could be argued that institutions are not fully harnessing students' optimistic expectations during the transition period. Despite potential disparity between expectations and reality, the fact that students hold desirable expectations regarding self-management and independent study is a notable positive. This presents an opportunity for educators to concentrate on guiding students towards realising these expectations, rather than forming them, and would be beneficial for all students given that expectations concerning autonomy are linked to favourable graduate attributes irrespective of subject area.

The third contribution this study makes to the academic conversation around learning and teaching expectations is that whilst some pre-enrolment factors are informing realistic expectations, others are informing generalised expectations that do not align with contemporary HE practice. This study adds to the literature highlighting family, friends, and FE as factors influencing expectations (Bennett et al., 2007; Harper et al., 2020) by taking a deeper look into the specific expectations being informed, and identifying social media and room layout as additional considerations.

By acknowledging and addressing the factors that influence student expectations, institutions can work towards creating an inclusive and responsive learning environment that meets student needs whilst facilitating success. Many HE institutions attempt to inform realistic expectations by working with feeder FE institutions to employ pre-enrolment transition initiatives, however these vary greatly and are unlikely to be course specific, with their effectiveness also impacted by the differing views of FE and HE staff (O'Donnell et al., 2015; Smith & Wertlieb, 2005). The differing views of FE staff are evidenced by the students interviewed here, who reported FE forming expectations of more work but less support, and teaching involving listening and notetaking without the opportunity for repetition. Expectations of this nature require development in order to highlight the extensive support available at university, interactivity within sessions, and opportunities for question and answer that are likely to promote early engagement.

The impact of family on expectations must be considered, with continuing generation students more likely to develop accurate expectations than first generation students (Harper et al., 2020; Hicks, 2003). Of the 12 students interviewed here, ten were continuing generation, which is likely to have contributed to the notions that university study is going to be a considerable jump from FE in terms of the volume of content and preparation required. These are all accurate expectations, however only helpful if students are prepared and supported to manage these realities. Some institutions have reported running successful 'Preparation for HE' events with prospective students and their parents, focusing on independent study and assessment at university and equipping parents with the knowledge to provide effective support and encouragement (Murtagh, 2012). Whilst these efforts are important, it is impossible to control all external influences and reach all students prior to enrolment. Therefore, in addition to pre-enrolment initiatives, further efforts to set/manage expectations and support transition should commence as soon as possible upon course enrolment. These should be a combination of general HE study information provided by institutions, programme led initiatives to ensure subject relevance, and module specific discussions in order to align with individual staff and topics (McKendry et al., 2014). Previous research into non-academic expectations indicates that students have high expectations of meeting new people, which could be realised and harnessed through the use of early peer mentoring or buddy programmes, linking first years with more experienced students for the purpose of education around university learning (Keup, 2007). This may prove to be less intimidating and more engaging than formal transition activities led by staff, however would require careful staff/student collaboration to ensure effectiveness. In addition to learning and teaching practices on the programme and tips for independent study, open discussion around contact hours, learning gaps, exam support, and attendance are suggested topics to help instil student confidence and aid transition (Morgan, 2020).

Given that the current generation of learners are more equipped with technology than ever, it is unsurprising that the students here have reported social media as a strong factor influencing expectations (Cilliers, 2017). Social media use has become part of student life for academic as well as personal benefit, and has been found to positively impact creativity, academic engagement, communication and collaboration (Gulzar et al., 2022; Mäntymäki & Riemer, 2016). With most institutions and often specific programmes now using social media for marketing and outreach, this may prove to be an effective tool to communicate the realities of learning and teaching in a particular subject area at an institution, whilst also attracting prospective students.

For example, in the context of sport rehabilitation, communicating the 'hands-on' nature of tasks in clinical sessions, or the pre-session theory tasks that have informed a particular seminar.

Previously termed 'built pedagogy', teaching space layout can impact the pedagogical approaches used within them (Elkington & Bligh, 2019; Monahan, 2002; Swinnerton, 2021), but also impact the pedagogical approaches students expect to be used within them, as confirmed here. The traditional lecture theatre depicts the educator as a narrator providing knowledge to passive leaners in forward facing fixed rows, and there is a conflict between active, student-centred teaching approaches and the many traditional, instruction focused teaching spaces within institutions (Elkington & Bligh, 2019; Swinnerton, 2021). Whilst it is appreciated that for many programmes, didactic or instruction focused teaching spaces are appropriate and regularly utilised, contemporary education, technology, and diverse student populations are forcing institutions to challenge traditional views of learning spaces (Elkington & Bligh, 2019). Updates now often focus on spaces that promote collaboration, interactivity and technology use, however the current financial landscape of HE means that for many institutions, opportunities for refurbishment are limited (Elkington & Bligh, 2019; Swinnerton, 2021). Educators should consider how to best use the teaching space they have available, and clarify to students how this will be realised within a module as part of module or session introductions. It would be helpful to consider the use of space during open days, where a didactic style teaching is often reinforced during large group talks that take place in lecture theatres, but may not be a primary learning and teaching method used on a particular programme such as Sport Rehabilitation. Whilst it is appreciated that these are often the best spaces to accommodate large numbers, demonstration of the different ways in which this space can be made more interactive, perhaps by utilising technology or peer discussion, could help to form realistic expectations.

Strengths and Limitations

The main strengths of this study are that to the authors knowledge, this is the first qualitative study to explore first-year student expectations of learning and teaching during transition to HE. A further strength is that there was a clear distinction between predictive expectations and ideal or desired expectations during the interview process, which has been identified as a limitation in previous literature relating to student expectations (Balloo, 2018).

There is a risk that participants may have responded with what they thought the researchers (as lecturers) would wish them to say about their expectations, so this may have been a limitation. To mitigate this, care was taken to ensure that the impact of the lecturer/student relationship was as minimal as possible, however it is acknowledged that preconceived ideas of the dynamic between these roles may have still impacted responses. It is also recognised that expectations will be inevitably influenced by the programme of study to which students are applying, which in this case was Sport Rehabilitation. Therefore, whilst findings are likely to be transferable to similar programmes, they may not be transferable to the entire first-year student population across HE.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the learning and teaching expectations of the first-year students interviewed here focus on passively acquiring a cognitive knowledge base within the classroom, rather than development of their ability to actively learn and construct knowledge, which they expect to

happen outside of the classroom. These insights may be useful in encouraging transparent dialogue between programme teams and students regarding pedagogical expectations specific to their academic programme, with the aim of aligning these expectations with programme specific educational realities. Moreover, such discussions can foster an appreciation for the development of autonomous learning skills, and the array of learning and teaching methods that can facilitate this. All of which are important factors in enhancing student engagement, satisfaction, academic success, and retention.

Future research should investigate student expectations of learning and teaching across other disciplines, and could also explore how these expectations develop over the course of a degree programme. Furthermore, research could investigate the effectiveness of interventions or intervention frameworks that could be tailored to a specific programme during transition, in order to help align student expectations with the realities of learning and teaching in HE.

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