

STUDENTS' EXPECTATIONS OF A "GOOD UNIVERSITY PROFESSOR" IN A PRIVATE INSTITUTION IN MEXICO: A QUALITATIVE STUDY***Jesús Alberto Sánchez Valtierra**

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Abstract

The study focuses on the expectations of students from private universities in Mexico regarding a "good university professor." Using a qualitative methodology, final-year undergraduate students in public accounting and business administration were interviewed. The results highlight both positive and negative characteristics of a good professor, as well as variations according to academic performance and field of study. Students value empathy, mastery of content, effective communication, and innovation in teaching. This study provides recommendations for improving teacher training and promoting more effective, student-centered teaching in private universities in Mexico.

Keywords: Student expectations, good professor, university teaching, qualitative methodology, teaching characteristics, teacher training.

INTRODUCTION

The quality of university teaching is a key factor in promoting meaningful educational experiences and optimal learning outcomes for students. Among the many variables influencing this quality, the role of the teacher is paramount. In recent years, various studies have focused on characterizing the traits and competencies that define a "good university professor" from the students' perspective. Identifying student expectations regarding desirable teaching practices is relevant because it allows for a comparison with the ideal profiles proposed by pedagogy and educational psychology. Additionally, it fosters a reconsideration of both initial and ongoing teacher training to align their competencies with the genuine demands and needs of the students they serve. In the context of private higher education in Mexico, it is pertinent to explore what characteristics students value and expect from a "good university professor." This sector has gained significant importance in recent decades, making it essential to attend to the voices of its students to guide the academic development of these institutions. In recent decades, private universities have grown in prominence within the landscape of higher education in Mexico. According to data from the National Association of Universities and Higher Education Institutions (ANUIES), in the 2020-2021 academic year, 33.4% of the total undergraduate enrollment in the country was in private institutions, representing more than one million students. This sector has experienced considerable growth, as in the 2000-2001 academic year, private universities only catered to 24.8% of undergraduate students nationwide. This increase reflects the growing demand for alternative educational options to the traditional public system. Furthermore, private institutions have diversified their academic offerings, covering not only traditional areas like business and social sciences but also branching into fields such as engineering, health sciences, and the arts. This expansion has enabled private universities to attract a broader segment of the student population.

Given the significant economic investment that students and their families make when opting for private education, it is crucial to understand their specific expectations and needs. Investigating the characteristics they value in a "good university professor" can provide valuable insights for these institutions to improve the quality of their teaching and align with the demands of their students, who are ultimately their clients and the center of their educational model.

The present study aims to:

1. Identify the traits that students at private universities in Mexico associate with a "good professor",
2. Analyze whether there are differences in these expectations according to the academic performance of the students, and
3. Examine possible variations in perceptions according to the area of study.

To this end, inductive qualitative research was conducted, gathering textual descriptions from the students themselves about the characteristics that define a good university professor. This methodological approach allowed for capturing the participants' conceptions in their own words, without imposing preconceived categories. Although some previous studies on this topic exist in the Mexican context, most have focused on public institutions. Private universities present a unique scenario, as they are for-profit organizations offering an educational service where students assume the role of clients making a significant economic investment. In this sense, it is relevant to investigate whether in this sector, student expectations of a good professor differ from those reported in other contexts. Understanding their demands and evaluations will allow the faculty of these private institutions to better align with the profiles desired by their students. Additionally, students' academic performance could influence their conceptions of a good professor. Those with lower performance might prioritize different traits than their more academically successful peers. Identifying these potential divergences will help define flexible and adaptive teacher profiles.

Research questions

1. What characteristics do students at private universities in Mexico consider defining a "good university professor"?
2. Are there differences in expectations of a good professor based on students' academic performance (high vs. low performance) in the private sector?
3. Are there variations in expectations according to the students' area of study within private institutions?

Importance of the study

This study will allow:

- a. Understanding students' perceptions of desirable characteristics in a university professor in the context of private institutions in Mexico.
- b. Identifying potential gaps between student expectations and current teaching practices.
- c. Providing valuable information to improve the training and professional development of teachers in the private sector.
- d. Offering insights for the development of educational policies that respond to the needs and demands of private university students.

Problem delimitation

This study will focus on the expectations of final-year undergraduate students in public accounting and business administration at a private university in Mexico. Students from other undergraduate programs will be excluded due to time constraints.

Definition of terms

- **Good professor:** A teacher who meets students' expectations and demands regarding personal characteristics, pedagogical skills, and commitment to teaching.
- **Academic performance:** The level of school achievement reflected in students' grades.
- **Area of study:** The field of knowledge in which a specific university program is focused (e.g., health sciences, engineering, humanities).
- **Private institutions:** Higher education institutions that do not depend on public funding.

Scope of the study

This study aims to conduct a qualitative analysis of students' expectations regarding a "good university professor" in a private institution in Mexico. It seeks to obtain detailed and in-depth information about the characteristics students consider important in their teachers and to identify possible differences in expectations based on academic performance and area of study.

Research objectives

From the main research question, the following specific objectives arise:

General objective: Identify the characteristics that students of private universities in Mexico consider to define a "good professor" through their own descriptions and perceptions.

Specific objectives:

- a) Analyze whether there are differences in expectations of a good professor based on students' academic performance (high vs. low performance) in the private sector.
- b) Examine whether there are variations in expectations according to the students' area of study within private institutions.

Justification of the research

This study is justified by the relevance of understanding the expectations of students at private universities in Mexico regarding the characteristics of a "good professor." This information can be highly useful for:

- a. Educational institutions: to improve the training and development of their teachers to better meet students' needs and expectations.
- b. Teachers: to reflect on their own teaching practice and seek strategies to improve their classroom performance.
- c. Students: to gain a better understanding of what they can expect from their professors and to actively participate in their own learning process.

Novelty and originality of the research

This study differs from previous research on the topic in the following aspects:

1. **Focus on private universities:** It centers on the expectations of students at private universities in Mexico, a sector that has received little attention in previous research.
2. **Qualitative methodology:** It uses a qualitative methodology that allows for a deep understanding of students' perceptions and experiences.
3. **Comparative analysis:** It compares students' expectations based on their academic performance and area of study, allowing for the identification of significant differences.

Potential impact of the research

The results of this research can positively impact higher education in Mexico by:

1. **Contributing to the improvement of teaching quality:** By identifying the characteristics students value in their professors, valuable information can be provided for teacher training and development.
2. **Promoting greater student participation:** Understanding students' expectations can help teachers create a more favorable and participatory learning environment.
3. **Strengthening the relationship between teachers and students:** Knowing the needs and expectations of students can help teachers establish better communication and relationships with them.

Reimagining the role of the university professor in private universities in Mexico

In the dynamic landscape of Mexican higher education, the university professor's role is a fundamental pillar for student success and the integral development of institutions (Alonso Martín, 2019). In the specific context of private universities, where economic investment and quality expectations are

considerable, understanding students' perceptions and demands about their professors is crucial (De Garay, 2019).

- **Rethinking the good professor:** Beyond a simple list of desirable competencies or attributes, the conceptualization of the "good professor" in Mexican private universities must transcend towards a holistic and creative vision that responds to the needs and expectations of current students (Beltrán Llera and Pérez Sánchez, 2005).
- **A teacher as a learning facilitator:** Within a student-centered educational paradigm, the teacher's role transforms into a learning facilitator, a guide who accompanies students in their knowledge construction process (Bossolasco and Chiecher, 2020). This approach requires a teacher with solid pedagogical skills, capable of designing meaningful and motivating learning experiences that promote students' autonomy, creativity, and critical thinking (Alonso Martín, 2019).
- **An inspiring mentor:** Beyond mere knowledge transmission, the university professor in the private sector must assume the role of a mentor, inspiring students to reach their full potential (Krzemien and Lombardo, 2006). A mentor is a confidant, a counselor who provides emotional support and professional guidance, fostering self-confidence and resilience in the face of challenges (Sánchez Ochoa and Domínguez Espinosa, 2007).
- **A constantly evolving researcher:** In a constantly changing world, the continuous updating of the teacher is essential to ensure quality teaching (Pérez Lindo, 2012). A teacher-researcher stays at the forefront of their discipline, incorporates new findings and methodologies into their classes, and promotes research as a tool for learning and innovation (Cid et al., 2009).
- **An effective communicator:** Effective communication is the cornerstone of teacher-student interaction (Martínez Rizo, 2012). A teacher with excellent communication skills can convey complex ideas clearly, concisely, and attractively, using various teaching resources and adapting their language to the students' level (Casero Martínez, 2010).
- **An inspiring leader:** Leadership within the classroom is crucial to creating a positive and collaborative learning environment (Bullock, 2015). An inspiring teacher encourages students to work together, take responsibility, and make informed decisions, fostering mutual respect and inclusion (Cid et al., 2009).
- **Enthusiasm for their discipline:** Passion for knowledge is contagious (Sánchez Ochoa and Domínguez Espinosa, 2007). An enthusiastic teacher, genuinely interested in their subject, can awaken the curiosity and intrinsic motivation of their students, encouraging them to explore and discover (Casero Martínez, 2010).
- **An empathetic human:** Empathy is the foundation of human connection (Beltrán Llera and Pérez Sánchez, 2005). An empathetic teacher understands the needs, emotions, and challenges of their students, creating a safe and supportive space where they feel valued and heard (Bossolasco and Chiecher, 2020).
- **A change agent:** The university professor in private institutions has the potential to be a change agent, promoting values such as social responsibility, professional ethics, and commitment to sustainable development (De Garay, 2019). An inspiring teacher can motivate their students to become active and responsible citizens,

contributing to the construction of a more just and equitable society (Alonso Martín, 2019).

METHODOLOGY

The research was based on a qualitative, descriptive approach, using semi-structured interviews as the primary method for obtaining information. This study sought to describe and understand students' expectations regarding the characteristics of a "good university professor" in private institutions in Mexico. Semi-structured interviews were used to collect data because they allow for in-depth exploration of participants' perceptions and experiences, providing flexibility to delve into emerging topics during the conversation. To ensure the representativeness of the sample, stratified intentional sampling was used. Final-year students from public accounting and business administration programs were selected, ensuring equitable distribution by gender and different levels of academic performance (high, medium, and low). Twenty-eight students were interviewed: 16 business administration students and 12 public accounting students. A questionnaire containing open-ended questions was designed as the data collection instrument. This questionnaire was applied during the interviews to guide the conversation and ensure the collection of relevant information. The data collected through the interviews were coded, identifying keywords, phrases, and relevant concepts. The semi-structured interview questionnaire consisted of 10 open-ended questions designed to explore students' perceptions of the characteristics of a good university professor. Key questions included: "Describe the qualities you consider essential in a good university professor," "What aspects do you value most in a professor's teaching style?" and "Could you share examples of professors you consider excellent and why?" The questionnaire was validated through a pilot test with 5 students and reviewed by two higher education experts.

The coding and analysis of qualitative data were carried out using an inductive approach. First, the interviews were transcribed verbatim. Then, two researchers independently coded the transcripts, identifying units of meaning, emerging concepts, and recurring patterns. Subsequently, triangulation of the assigned codes was performed to ensure consistency. Finally, the codes were grouped into main categories and themes through an iterative process of constant comparison. MAXQDA software was used to facilitate the management and organization of qualitative data. This coding facilitated the systematic organization and analysis of the information. The coded data were then analyzed for recurring patterns and emerging themes. This analysis allowed for the comprehensive interpretation and understanding of participants' testimonies, contributing to the construction of knowledge about the characteristics that define a "good professor" from the students' perspective. Confidentiality and anonymity of all participants were ensured to protect their identity and ensure they felt comfortable sharing their opinions and experiences. Before conducting the interviews, informed consent was obtained from each participant. This involved explaining the study's purpose, how their data would be used, and ensuring they understood and agreed to participate voluntarily. Throughout the process, ethical principles of research involving human subjects were followed, ensuring respect, dignity, and the rights of the participants.

RESULTS

From the qualitative data collected from students across various faculties with different overall averages (Grade Point Average, GPA), several recurring themes and desirable characteristics of a 'good university professor' were identified. Below is a summary of the most significant findings:

Positive characteristics of a good professor:

- Mastery of content and pedagogical skills: Students value professors who have a deep knowledge of their field and the ability to teach clearly and effectively.
- Empathy and patience: It is essential for a professor to be empathetic and patient, understanding the individual needs of students and providing appropriate emotional support.
- Effective communication: The ability to communicate clearly and engagingly is crucial. This includes the ability to explain difficult concepts in a comprehensible and accessible manner.
- Innovation and updating: Students appreciate professors who continually innovate in their teaching methods and stay updated with the latest developments in their field.
- Commitment and passion for teaching: The dedication and enthusiasm of the professor are contagious and motivate students to learn and actively participate.
- Adaptability and flexibility: The ability to adapt to different learning styles and individual student situations is positively valued.

These findings are supported by textual quotes from interviewed students, such as:

"A good professor should not only master the subject but also know how to explain it clearly and patiently, addressing our doubts without judging us" (Public accounting student, high GPA).

"I highly value when a professor is approachable and empathetic, knows us by name, and cares about our learning beyond just grading us" (Business administration student, medium GPA).

"The best professors are those who innovate and do not stick to the same methods year after year. They use technology, practical cases, and make the classes very dynamic" (Public accounting student, high GPA).

Negative characteristics of a less favorable professor:

- Lack of enthusiasm and motivation: Students mention that professors who do not show passion for their subject or teaching tend to demotivate students.
- Poor communication: The lack of clarity in explaining topics and the inability to effectively use available technologies are seen as significant impediments to learning.
- Outdated: Professors who do not stay updated with advances in their field and who repeat old methods without adapting to new educational realities are criticized.
- Lack of empathy and respect: Disrespectful attitudes, favoritism, and lack of consideration for students' opinions and needs create a negative and non-conducive learning environment.

These negative perceptions are illustrated in comments such as:

"Some professors seem to lack a teaching vocation, they just come to give their lecture monotonously and without motivating us" (Business administration student, low GPA).

"It's frustrating when the professor can't explain a topic well and we have to research it on our own. Communication is key" (Public accounting student, medium GPA).

Variations in expectations based on academic performance:

- Students with higher GPAs tend to emphasize the importance of innovation, mastery of content, and continuous updating of the professor.
- Those with lower GPAs highlight the need for empathy, patience, and emotional support from their professors.

Differences according to the area of study:

Students from public accounting and business administration share many similar expectations, valuing empathy, effective communication, and passion for teaching. However, public accounting students place more emphasis on the need for practical examples and clarity in explanations.

Table 1. Characteristics considered essential in a "Good University Professor"

Characteristics	Positive comments	Negative comments
Content mastery	"Deep understanding and clear explanations"	"Lack of enthusiasm and motivation"
Empathy	"Understanding individual needs"	"Lack of empathy and respect"
Communication	"Clear and engaging communication"	"Poor communication skills"
Innovation	"Continuous innovation in teaching"	"Resistance to change and outdated methods"
Commitment	"Dedication and passion for teaching"	"Lack of commitment and enthusiasm"
Adaptability	"Ability to cater to different learning styles"	"Inflexibility and inability to adapt"

Source: Original Design

DISCUSSION

The results of this qualitative study have revealed a series of characteristics and competencies that students at private universities in Mexico consider fundamental in a "good university professor." Among the most mentioned positive characteristics are empathy, pedagogical skill, effective communication, passion for teaching, and the ability to motivate. Students value those teachers who demonstrate a genuine interest in their learning and well-being, employ innovative pedagogical methods, and can explain academic content clearly and comprehensibly. Empathy and patience emerge as key attributes, as students value teachers who understand their needs and challenges and are willing to support them in their learning process. Passion for teaching is also highly appreciated, as an enthusiastic teacher can inspire and motivate students to reach their full potential. Additionally, the ability to communicate effectively is highlighted as crucial, allowing students to better understand topics and feel more involved in the educational process. In contrast, the negative characteristics identified by students

include a lack of enthusiasm, rigidity in teaching methods, poor communication, and inadequate handling of technologies. Students' express frustration with teachers who do not show interest in their teaching role, are inflexible to individual student needs, and do not update their knowledge and pedagogical skills.

These findings are consistent with previous research conducted in similar contexts:

1. Alonso Martín (2019) indicates that a good teacher should be a facilitator of learning, guiding students in their knowledge construction process, which aligns with students' expectations that their teachers demonstrate strong pedagogical skills and a supportive attitude.
2. De Garay (2019) emphasizes the importance of teachers in private universities understanding students' perceptions and demands, highlighting the need for empathy and effective communication, aspects reiterated in the participants' testimonies in this study.
3. Beltrán Llera and Pérez Sánchez (2005) argue that a good teacher should transcend a list of competencies towards a holistic and creative vision that responds to students' needs, reflected in students' appreciation for innovative and passionate teachers.
4. Bossolasco and Chiecher (2020) describe the teacher as an inspiring mentor and an effective communicator, attributes that also emerge as fundamental in the results of this study.

These findings suggest the need for private higher education institutions in Mexico to review and adjust their teacher training and development programs. It is essential for teachers not only to possess solid knowledge of their discipline but also to develop pedagogical skills and interpersonal competencies that allow them to create a positive and effective learning environment. The findings of this study show notable similarities with the conclusions of previous research in similar contexts. For example, Alonso Martín (2019) and Bossolasco and Chiecher (2020) emphasize the importance of the teacher as a facilitator of learning and an effective communicator, aspects highly valued by the participating students. However, the results also reveal some important differences. While studies like that of Beltrán Llera and Pérez Sánchez (2005) primarily highlight technical pedagogical skills, this research underscores that students in private universities place significant weight on the teacher's interpersonal competencies, such as empathy, patience, and motivational ability. This could be explained by the nature of the relationship between students and teachers in private institutions, where the student assumes a role closer to that of a "client" making a considerable economic investment. Consequently, expectations transcend merely academic aspects to also demand personalized attention and genuine concern for their well-being and holistic development. These findings are supported by the theory of service marketing (Lovelock and Wirtz, 2015), which emphasizes the importance of human interaction and the creation of positive experiences for the client in service environments, such as higher private education. In contrast to traditional models focused solely on knowledge transmission, the results suggest that in the analyzed context, the figure of the "good professor" approaches more the concept of "service professional" proposed by Challagalla *et al.* (2014), which combines technical expertise with strong interpersonal skills to meet the needs of their "clients" comprehensively. Continuous updating and innovation in teaching practice are also crucial.

Pérez Lindo (2012) highlights the importance of teachers staying at the forefront of their discipline and adapting their teaching methods to new educational and technological demands, ensuring that their students receive quality education relevant to the current context. The research underscores that a "good university professor" in the context of private universities in Mexico is one who combines solid pedagogical competencies, interpersonal skills, and an attitude of constant improvement and adaptation. Meeting the expectations and needs of students not only improves their educational experience but also contributes to the holistic development of educational institutions and the academic success of students. Implementing these recommendations can strengthen the quality of higher education in the private sector, benefiting students, teachers, and the educational community.

Conclusion

The qualitative analysis reveals that students' expectations of a "good professor" in private universities in Mexico revolve around key characteristics such as content mastery, pedagogical skills, empathy, and the ability to motivate and innovate. However, this study highlights an original contribution by demonstrating the importance that students in this sector place on teachers' interpersonal competencies, beyond merely academic aspects. This revelation is relevant for rethinking teacher training models in private higher education, incorporating a more holistic approach focused on developing socio-emotional skills. Although the differences found in expectations based on academic performance and the field of study underline the need for flexible and adaptive teacher profiles, this finding constitutes a significant contribution to understanding that student demands may vary depending on various factors. In this sense, the study lays the groundwork for future research that delves deeper into the analysis of these variations and their implications for designing personalized professional development programs for teachers according to the specific needs of different student groups. Ultimately, these results provide a valuable empirical basis for implementing educational policies in private universities that promote more effective, student-centered teaching, meeting their genuine expectations. It is recommended to explore institutional strategies to foster a culture of continuous evaluation of student needs and their incorporation into teacher training and updating plans. For future research, it is suggested to extend the study to other private institutions in different regions of Mexico, to identify possible geographical or cultural variations in student expectations. Additionally, it would be valuable to conduct longitudinal studies that examine how these expectations may evolve as students' progress in their academic journey.

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