

EVALUATION OF THE EXPECTATION–EXPERIENCE GAP AND INFORMATION TRANSPARENCY ON PATIENT SATISFACTION

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Abstract

Patient satisfaction is a key indicator in evaluating the quality of healthcare services, particularly in the context of patient-centered care. This study aims to analyze the impact of the expectation–experience gap and information transparency on patient satisfaction through a literature review approach. The expectation–experience gap refers to the discrepancy between patients’ prior expectations and their actual experiences during healthcare service delivery, while information transparency relates to the clarity, openness, and accessibility of information provided to patients. This study employs a qualitative literature review method by collecting and analyzing secondary data from peer-reviewed journals, books, and relevant academic sources. The selected literature focuses on healthcare service quality, patient satisfaction, and communication practices. The analysis is conducted using a thematic approach to identify patterns, relationships, and key findings related to the research variables. The results indicate that the expectation–experience gap has a direct and significant effect on patient satisfaction. A smaller gap leads to higher satisfaction, while a larger gap results in dissatisfaction.

Keywords: *expectation–experience gap, information transparency, patient satisfaction*

INTRODUCTION

Patient satisfaction has become a central indicator in evaluating the quality of healthcare services, particularly in the context of increasingly competitive and patient-centered health systems. Hospitals and healthcare providers are now required not only to deliver clinically effective care but also to ensure that services align with patient expectations (Sitepu & Kosasih, 2024). The gap between what patients expect prior to receiving care and what they actually experience commonly referred to as the expectation–experience gap has emerged as a critical determinant of overall satisfaction. When healthcare services fail to meet or exceed expectations, dissatisfaction may arise, potentially affecting patient trust, loyalty, and compliance with medical recommendations (Kosasih & Paramarta, 2020). One of the key challenges in healthcare delivery is managing patient expectations, which are often shaped by prior experiences, social influences, and access to information (Mustoha et al., 2024). In many cases, patients enter healthcare facilities with high expectations regarding service quality, responsiveness, and communication (Anathasia et al., 2024). However, limitations such as overcrowding, inadequate staffing, and inefficient service systems may result in experiences that fall short of these expectations. This discrepancy creates a negative perception of service quality, even when the technical aspects of care are adequate. Therefore, evaluating the expectation–experience gap is essential to identify areas where healthcare services need improvement (Pr et al., 2025).

To the expectation–experience gap, information transparency plays a significant role in shaping patient satisfaction. Transparent communication regarding diagnosis, treatment options, costs, and procedures can enhance patient understanding and trust (Yuliaty & Dewi, 2025). Conversely, a lack of clear and accessible information often leads to confusion, uncertainty, and dissatisfaction. In modern healthcare systems, patients increasingly demand openness and clarity, particularly in administrative processes and financial aspects of care (Wahyudi & Kosasih, 2024). Transparency not only supports informed decision-making but also strengthens the relationship between healthcare providers and patients (Nursoffa et al., 2025). The urgency of addressing these issues is further emphasized by the growing emphasis on quality assurance and patient-centered care in healthcare policies and accreditation standards. Patient satisfaction is no longer viewed merely as an outcome but as an integral component

of healthcare quality assessment (Azizahm 2024). Failure to address gaps in expectations and shortcomings in information transparency may result in decreased service utilization, negative word-of-mouth, and diminished institutional reputation. Therefore, healthcare providers must adopt systematic approaches to evaluate and improve these aspects of service delivery (Thungari et al., 2026). From a theoretical perspective, the concept of service quality is closely linked to the disconfirmation theory, which posits that satisfaction is determined by the comparison between expectations and perceived performance (Woestho, 2017). When performance exceeds expectations, positive disconfirmation occurs, leading to satisfaction; conversely, negative disconfirmation results in dissatisfaction. Furthermore, communication theory highlights the importance of clear, accurate, and timely information in reducing uncertainty and enhancing user experience (Purnama & Yuliaty, 2025). These theoretical frameworks provide a strong foundation for analyzing how expectation–experience gaps and information transparency influence patient satisfaction.

Empirical studies have consistently demonstrated that both expectation–experience alignment and transparency significantly affect patient perceptions of healthcare quality (Dermawan et al., 2025). Patients who perceive that their expectations are met are more likely to report higher levels of satisfaction, trust, and willingness to return (Hermansyah et al., 2025). Similarly, transparent information practices have been associated with improved patient engagement and reduced complaints (Setyagraha et al., 2026). However, despite the growing body of research, there remains a need for context-specific analysis, particularly in healthcare settings where resource constraints and systemic challenges may influence service delivery. Based on the background described above, this study aims to evaluate the effect of the expectation–experience gap and information transparency on patient satisfaction. Specifically, this study seeks to (1) analyze the extent of the gap between patient expectations and actual service experiences, (2) assess the level of information transparency provided by healthcare institutions, and (3) examine the influence of these factors on overall patient satisfaction. To achieve these objectives, a structured approach is required, including the identification of key service indicators, measurement of patient perceptions, and statistical analysis to determine the relationships between variables. The findings of this study are expected to provide practical insights for healthcare providers in improving service quality, enhancing transparency, and ultimately increasing patient satisfaction.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Expectation–Experience Gap

The expectation–experience gap refers to the discrepancy between patients' expectations prior to receiving healthcare services and their actual experiences after the services are delivered. This concept is grounded in the disconfirmation of expectations theory, which posits that satisfaction is determined by the comparison between initial expectations and perceived service performance (Nurdiansyah et al., 2025). When the perceived performance exceeds expectations, positive disconfirmation occurs, leading to satisfaction. Conversely, when performance falls short of expectations, negative disconfirmation arises, resulting in dissatisfaction (Zulhijrah, 2025). In the healthcare context, patient expectations are influenced by various factors, including prior experiences, word-of-mouth, hospital reputation, and access to health-related information. Meanwhile, patient experience encompasses multiple dimensions of service delivery, such as the quality of interaction with healthcare providers, responsiveness, waiting time, facility conditions, and clarity of procedures. The gap between these expectations and experiences serves as a crucial indicator in evaluating service quality (Setyagraha et al., 2026).

Information Transparency

Information transparency in healthcare refers to the openness, clarity, and accessibility of information provided to patients regarding diagnoses, treatment options, risks, procedures, costs, and patient rights and responsibilities. It is a fundamental component of *patient-centered care*, where patients are actively involved in decision-making processes related to their health (Muchtar et al., 2024). From a communication theory perspective, clear, accurate, and timely information reduces uncertainty and enhances patient trust in healthcare providers (Citra et al., 2025). In practice, information transparency extends beyond clinical aspects to include administrative and financial information, such as detailed billing and insurance procedures. A lack of transparency often becomes a major source of patient dissatisfaction. Incomplete or unclear information may lead to confusion, misinterpretation, and distrust toward healthcare professionals. In contrast, high levels of transparency can improve patient satisfaction, strengthen patient-provider relationships, and encourage patient engagement in the care process (Rahmayanti et al., 2023).

Patient Satisfaction

Patient satisfaction is defined as a patient's subjective evaluation of the quality of healthcare services received. It reflects the extent to which the provided services meet or exceed patient expectations. In healthcare settings, patient satisfaction is widely recognized as a key indicator of service performance and quality (Wulaningsih et al., 2024). Patient satisfaction is influenced by both technical and non-technical factors. Technical factors include the accuracy of diagnosis and effectiveness of treatment, while non-technical factors involve aspects such as staff behavior, responsiveness, communication, waiting time, and the comfort of facilities (Hindarti & Yuliaty, 2024). Additionally, psychological and emotional factors also play a role in shaping patient perceptions (Kosasih & Paramarta, 2020). The SERVQUAL model is commonly used to measure patient satisfaction, consisting of five key dimensions: *tangibles*, *reliability*, *responsiveness*, *assurance*, and *empathy*. This model helps identify gaps between patient expectations and perceived service performance. Patient satisfaction has significant implications for healthcare organizations (Rosmini et al., 2025). Satisfied patients are more likely to trust healthcare providers, adhere to treatment recommendations, return for future services, and recommend the facility to others. Therefore, improving patient satisfaction is a critical objective in healthcare management and service delivery (Irawan & Sitanggang, 2020).

METHOD

This study employs a literature review method to analyze the relationship between the expectation–experience gap, information transparency, and patient satisfaction. The literature review approach is used to systematically collect, evaluate, and synthesize findings from previous studies relevant to the research variables. This method allows for a comprehensive understanding of theoretical concepts, empirical evidence, and research gaps related to patient satisfaction in healthcare services. The data used in this study are secondary data obtained from various scientific sources, including peer-reviewed journal articles, books, and reputable academic publications. The selection of literature focuses on studies published within the last ten years to ensure the relevance and timeliness of the findings. However, seminal theories and foundational concepts are also included to strengthen the theoretical framework. The process of data collection was conducted through a systematic search using academic databases such as Google Scholar, ScienceDirect, Springer, and other scholarly platforms. Keywords used in the search process include “expectation–experience gap,” “service quality,” “information transparency,” “patient satisfaction,” and “healthcare services.” These keywords were used individually and in combination to obtain a broad yet relevant range of literature. To ensure the quality and relevance of the selected literature, inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied.

The inclusion criteria consist of: (1) studies related to healthcare services, (2) research discussing at least one of the main variables, and (3) publications in reputable journals or academic sources. Meanwhile, the exclusion criteria include: (1) studies not directly related to the research topic, (2) non-academic publications, and (3) articles with insufficient methodological clarity. The data analysis technique used in this study is qualitative descriptive analysis. This involves organizing the collected literature based on themes and variables, followed by critical evaluation and synthesis of the findings. The analysis aims to identify patterns, similarities, and differences among previous studies, as well as to highlight the influence of the expectation–experience gap and information transparency on patient satisfaction. Furthermore, this study adopts a thematic analysis approach, where the literature is categorized into key themes corresponding to the research variables. Each theme is analyzed in depth to understand its contribution to patient satisfaction. The results of the analysis are then integrated to form a comprehensive conceptual understanding of the relationships between variables.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Analysis of the Expectation–Experience Gap in Healthcare Services

The expectation–experience gap in healthcare services refers to the difference between what patients anticipate before receiving care and what they actually experience during and after service delivery. Based on the literature review, this gap is a fundamental factor influencing patient satisfaction, as it directly reflects the alignment between perceived service performance and prior expectations. The concept is closely linked to the *disconfirmation of expectations theory*, which explains that satisfaction occurs when experiences meet or exceed expectations, while dissatisfaction arises when expectations are not fulfilled (Setyagraha et al., 2026). In healthcare settings, patient expectations are shaped by multiple factors, including previous healthcare experiences, recommendations from family or peers, hospital reputation, and access to information through digital media. Patients generally expect timely service, clear communication, professional behavior from healthcare providers, adequate facilities, and effective

treatment outcomes. However, the actual experiences often vary due to systemic and operational constraints such as long waiting times, limited medical staff, administrative inefficiencies, and inconsistent service quality (Irawan & Sitanggang, 2020). The analysis of existing studies reveals that a negative expectation–experience gap is more commonly observed in healthcare services. This occurs when patients perceive that the quality of service delivered is lower than what they initially expected. For instance, delays in service, lack of clear communication, or unfriendly staff attitudes can significantly reduce patient satisfaction, even when the clinical treatment provided is technically appropriate. This indicates that non-clinical aspects of service play a crucial role in shaping patient perceptions (Zulhijrah, 2025).

Conversely, a positive gap where patient experiences exceed expectations can significantly enhance satisfaction and trust. This situation may occur when healthcare providers deliver services more efficiently than expected, communicate effectively, and demonstrate empathy and professionalism. Positive experiences not only improve patient satisfaction but also contribute to patient loyalty and positive word-of-mouth. Furthermore, the literature emphasizes that the expectation–experience gap is not solely determined by service performance but also by how well expectations are managed. Unrealistic or overly high expectations can widen the gap, even if service quality is objectively good. Therefore, managing patient expectations through accurate and transparent communication is essential. Providing clear information about procedures, waiting times, and possible outcomes can help align patient expectations with actual service conditions. The gap can vary across different dimensions of healthcare services, including reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and tangibles. Studies using the SERVQUAL model demonstrate that gaps are often more pronounced in responsiveness and empathy, particularly in high-demand healthcare settings. This suggests that interpersonal aspects of care are as important as technical competence in reducing the gap.

The Role of Information Transparency in Patient Satisfaction

Information transparency plays a crucial role in shaping patient satisfaction within healthcare services. It refers to the extent to which healthcare providers openly, clearly, and accurately communicate relevant information to patients, including diagnoses, treatment options, procedures, risks, waiting times, and costs. Based on the literature, transparency is not merely an ethical obligation but a structural component of service quality that directly influences how patients interpret and evaluate their healthcare experiences (Citra et al., 2025). From an analytical perspective, information transparency functions as a cognitive enabler that helps patients construct meaning from the services they receive. When patients are provided with comprehensive and comprehensible information, they are better equipped to interpret medical processes, anticipate outcomes, and assess whether the services delivered are appropriate. This cognitive clarity reduces ambiguity, which is a major source of psychological discomfort in healthcare settings. As uncertainty decreases, patients are more likely to perceive the service as reliable and professionally managed, thereby increasing satisfaction (Rahmayanti et al., 2023).

Furthermore, transparency has a regulatory function in shaping perceived fairness. In healthcare, perceptions of fairness are not only related to clinical outcomes but also to procedural and distributive aspects, such as how decisions are made and how costs are determined. When information regarding procedures and financial obligations is clearly disclosed, patients are more likely to perceive the service as just and accountable. This perception of fairness significantly contributes to satisfaction, even in situations where outcomes may not fully meet expectations. In addition, transparency plays a strategic role in expectation calibration rather than merely expectation fulfillment. By providing accurate and realistic information at the outset, healthcare providers can shape patient expectations to align more closely with actual service capabilities. This reduces the likelihood of inflated expectations that often lead to dissatisfaction. In this sense, transparency operates as a proactive mechanism that minimizes perceptual gaps and stabilizes patient evaluations of service quality.

Moreover, information transparency enhances relational dynamics between patients and healthcare providers. Clear and honest communication fosters a sense of respect and inclusion, positioning patients as active participants in their own care. This participatory dynamic strengthens emotional trust, which goes beyond cognitive trust in clinical competence. Emotional trust is particularly important in healthcare contexts, as it influences patients' willingness to disclose information, adhere to treatment, and maintain long-term relationships with providers. Another critical dimension is the role of transparency in facilitating patient empowerment. Access to accurate information enables patients to engage in shared decision-making, where they can weigh options, understand risks, and make choices that align with their preferences and values. This sense of autonomy contributes to a more meaningful healthcare experience, which is closely associated with higher satisfaction levels. Overall, information transparency should be understood as a multidimensional construct that influences patient satisfaction through

cognitive, emotional, and relational pathways. Its impact extends beyond the mere provision of information to include the quality, clarity, and timing of communication. By integrating transparency into all aspects of service delivery, healthcare providers can not only improve patient satisfaction but also enhance trust, fairness perceptions, and patient engagement in a sustainable manner.

The Impact of Expectation–Experience Gap and Information Transparency on Patient Satisfaction

The expectation–experience gap and information transparency are two interrelated determinants that significantly influence patient satisfaction in healthcare services. Based on the literature, patient satisfaction is not formed solely by the actual quality of medical treatment, but rather through a complex evaluative process in which patients compare their expectations with their real experiences, while simultaneously interpreting the information provided to them during the service process. The expectation–experience gap directly affects how patients assess service performance. When the services delivered align with or exceed patient expectations, satisfaction is likely to emerge as a result of positive confirmation. However, when there is a discrepancy particularly when experiences fall below expectations patients tend to perceive the service as inadequate, regardless of its clinical effectiveness. This highlights that patient satisfaction is largely perception-based, where subjective evaluation plays a more dominant role than objective service quality.

At the same time, information transparency acts as a critical moderating and shaping factor in this evaluative process. Transparency influences not only how patients understand their experiences but also how they construct their expectations prior to receiving care. Clear, accurate, and timely information enables patients to form realistic expectations, thereby reducing the likelihood of a significant gap between expectations and actual experiences. In contrast, limited or unclear information often leads to misaligned expectations, which increases the risk of dissatisfaction. In addition, the interaction between these two variables reveals that transparency has a buffering effect on negative experiences. When patients encounter service shortcomings such as delays or procedural complexities transparent communication can mitigate dissatisfaction by providing explanations and context. Patients are generally more tolerant of service limitations when they feel informed and respected. This indicates that transparency does not eliminate service gaps but can soften their negative impact on patient satisfaction.

Moreover, the combined influence of the expectation–experience gap and information transparency extends to the formation of trust and long-term patient relationships. A small or well-managed gap, supported by high transparency, fosters a sense of reliability and credibility in healthcare providers. Patients are more likely to develop confidence in institutions that consistently communicate openly and deliver services in line with communicated expectations. Conversely, a large gap combined with poor transparency can erode trust, leading to negative perceptions, reduced loyalty, and reluctance to reuse healthcare services. Another important aspect is the role of these variables in shaping patient engagement. When expectations are clearly managed and information is transparently delivered, patients are more likely to participate actively in their care process. This engagement contributes to a more positive healthcare experience, as patients feel informed, involved, and valued. As a result, satisfaction is not only derived from outcomes but also from the process of care itself.

Overall, the impact of the expectation–experience gap and information transparency on patient satisfaction is both direct and interactive. The expectation–experience gap determines the baseline evaluation of service quality, while information transparency influences how that evaluation is formed, interpreted, and adjusted. Healthcare providers that are able to minimize service gaps while maintaining high levels of transparency are more likely to achieve higher patient satisfaction, stronger trust, and sustainable service quality improvements.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights that patient satisfaction in healthcare services is fundamentally shaped by the interaction between the expectation–experience gap and information transparency. The expectation–experience gap serves as a primary evaluative mechanism through which patients assess service quality, where satisfaction is achieved when actual experiences meet or exceed prior expectations. Conversely, discrepancies between expectations and experiences, particularly negative gaps, tend to generate dissatisfaction regardless of the technical adequacy of medical care. In parallel, information transparency emerges as a critical factor that influences how patients construct expectations and interpret their service experiences. Transparent communication not only reduces uncertainty but also enables patients to develop realistic expectations, thereby minimizing potential gaps. Furthermore, transparency plays a mitigating role in situations where service limitations occur, as clear explanations and open communication can preserve patient trust and reduce negative perceptions.

The findings also emphasize that the relationship between these variables is inherently interconnected. Information transparency supports the alignment of expectations with actual service delivery, while the expectation–experience gap reflects the outcome of that alignment. Together, they shape patients’ overall perception of healthcare quality, trust in providers, and willingness to engage in future healthcare interactions. Ultimately, improving patient satisfaction requires a dual approach that focuses on both enhancing service performance and strengthening communication practices. Healthcare providers must not only deliver high-quality services but also ensure that patients are adequately informed throughout the care process. By minimizing expectation–experience discrepancies and fostering transparent communication, healthcare institutions can achieve more consistent, patient-centered, and sustainable improvements in service quality.

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