

Graduate profiles of Dentistry programs in Peru*

 *Luis Angel Velasco Luna^{1,a},*
 *Geraldine Denisse Williams*
Huicaya^{1,a},
 *Luis Daniel Zuñiga Rodriguez^{1,a},*
 *Milagros Bertha Carrasco Loyola^{1,b}*

¹ Universidad Peruana Cayetano
Heredia. Lima, Peru.

^a Dental Surgeon.

^b PhD. in Educational Sciences.

ABSTRACT

Objective: To identify the competencies declared in the graduate profiles of Dentistry and Stomatology programs in Peru. **Materials and methods:** A descriptive, cross-sectional, observational study was conducted. The study population comprised Dentistry and Stomatology programs listed in TUNI, the official platform of the National Superintendency of Higher University Education (SUNEDU). Programs with no publicly available graduate profile information on their institutional websites were excluded. Competencies were extracted, categorized, and systematized based on reference frameworks from the Peruvian Dental Association and the Ministry of Health. **Results:** The most frequent competencies in the graduate profiles were clinical and research-related (85.19%; $n = 23$), followed by ethical-moral competencies (70.37%; $n = 19$). Empathy was the least frequently reported competency (11.11%; $n = 3$). **Conclusion:** Across public and private universities, clinical and research competencies were the most prevalent in the graduate profiles of Dentistry and Stomatology programs in Peru.

Keywords: professional competence; dental education; professional profile.

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INTRODUCTION

In Peru, the main objective of the National Policy on Higher and Technical-Productive Education is that, by 2030, at least five out of ten Peruvians will have access to comprehensive education that enables them to acquire skills for professional practice, as well as for research and innovation, thus contributing to the country's progress and competitiveness (1). Within this context, higher education institutions and their academic programs must design relevant graduate profiles that respond to social and labor market needs, guiding professional training toward the development of instrumental, cognitive, and ethical skills (2).

In academic programs, the terms “dentistry” and “stomatology” are often used interchangeably; however, there are technical differences: the former focuses on the study and treatment of teeth, whereas the latter more broadly addresses disorders of the oral cavity (3). Professional training is planned around a graduate profile, which is defined as the set of skills, competencies, and values that students are expected to have upon completion of the professional program; therefore, it is considered the guiding axis of training (4). By contrast, the professional profile describes the competencies possessed by the professional that allow them to be recognized as such by society (5). In this sense, Dentistry and Stomatology programs seek to develop competencies in the diagnosis, prevention, and treatment of oral diseases, as well as to promote oral health within the community (6).

According to the Peruvian Dental Association (COP) (7), professionals must have three fundamental competencies that guide their professional performance: i) Being able to provide health services, understand and address stomatological needs; ii) Being able to manage and plan health services and carry out administrative actions and processes in accordance with current regulations; and iii) Being able to generate knowledge in the field of health and conduct scientific research in oral health, disseminating results while complying with publication standards and applicable regulations.

In 2022, the Ministry of Health (MINSA) (8) established thirteen competencies for the Peruvian dental surgeon, grouped into eight domains. Nine of these competencies are technical in nature, ranging from diagnosis to treatment planning and execution; the remaining four are behavioral competencies, focused on prioritizing health and multidisciplinary teamwork.

In Latin America, a study conducted in 219 dental schools aimed to identify the competencies included in their professional profiles. The main competencies identified were problem-solving related to oral health (89.0%), ethics and morals (80.0%), and the promotion

of oral health and disease prevention in individuals and communities (73.0%) (9).

The objective of this study was to identify the competencies declared in the graduate profiles of Dentistry and Stomatology programs in Peru. This information will contribute to strengthening alignment between university education and national health policies, as well as guiding institutions in the development or updating of their dentistry curricula.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This was a descriptive, cross-sectional, and observational study. The study population consisted of Dentistry and Stomatology programs in Peru, identified through the TUNI portal, a digital platform of the National Superintendence of Higher University Education (SUNEDU). Only programs belonging to universities licensed by this institution were included, and those that did not have public information on graduate profiles were excluded. Out of a total of 30 universities offering Dentistry and Stomatology programs, 3 were excluded for not meeting the established criteria, resulting in a final sample of 27 universities.

Data collection was carried out by accessing the web links available on the SUNEDU portal and subsequently reviewing the official websites of the academic programs. The information was organized into a Microsoft Excel matrix, which recorded the name of the university, type of management (public or private), and the competencies included in the graduate profile. Subsequently, an alignment matrix was developed to analyze and systematize the competencies, representing them through keywords derived from their descriptions. These terms were summarized into words that synthesized the area or dimension to which each competency referred. The competencies were grouped according to two main reference frameworks: the professional competencies of the dental surgeon established by the Peruvian Dental Association (COP) and the competency profile of the Peruvian dental surgeon defined by the Ministry of Health (MINSA). Descriptive statistical analysis was performed using Microsoft Excel functions, calculating absolute and relative frequencies.

This study was approved by the Office for Research Regulation and Ethical Assessment (ORVEI) of the Universidad Peruana Cayetano Heredia (UPCH). The project was registered under the Decentralized Research Information and Monitoring System (SIDISI) No. 208033, dated February 27, 2024 (CAR-DUARI-O-42-24).

RESULTS

Of the 27 universities included in this study, 11 offered Stomatology programs and 16 offered Dentistry programs. Overall, 63.00% ($n = 17$) belonged to the private sector and 37.00% ($n = 10$) to the public sector. The systematization of graduate profiles made it possible to identify 13 competencies, grouped into the following categories: clinical competency, management, promotion, community, research, communication, empathy, humanistic approach, ethics/morals, critical thinking, environment, foreign language, and leadership. The most frequently found competencies

in the profiles were clinical and research, each with 85.20% ($n = 23$). In contrast, the least common were empathy, with 11.10% ($n = 3$), and proficiency in a foreign language, with 18.50% ($n = 5$). All public universities included research competency in their graduate profiles, while private universities predominantly included clinical competency, with 88.20% ($n = 15$). In both public and private universities, empathy was the least frequently identified competency, appearing in only two graduate profiles from private universities (11.70%; $n = 2$) and one from public universities (10.00%; $n = 1$) (Table 1).

Table 1. Competencies included in the graduate profiles of the Dentistry and Stomatology programs in Peru.

Competencies	Private universities ($n = 17$)		Public universities ($n = 10$)		Total ($n = 27$)	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Clinical Competency	15	88.20	8	80.00	23	85.19
Management	8	47.00	6	60.00	14	51.85
Promotion	10	58.80	8	80.00	18	66.67
Community	7	41.10	7	70.00	14	51.85
Research	13	76.40	10	100.00	23	85.19
Communication	8	47.00	5	50.00	13	48.15
Empathy	2	11.70	1	10.00	3	11.11
Humanistic Approach	6	35.20	3	30.00	9	33.33
Ethics/morals	14	82.30	5	50.00	19	70.37
Critical thinking	10	58.80	3	30.00	13	48.15
Environment	4	23.50	5	50.00	9	33.33
Foreign language	5	29.40	0	0.00	5	18.52
Leadership	6	35.20	3	30.00	9	33.33

According to the alignment matrix, developed based on the guidelines of COP and MINSA, the competencies most frequently identified in the graduate profiles were once again clinical and research competencies. In contrast, empathy and foreign language proficiency were not contemplated within the COP/MINSA reference frameworks. It should be noted that this matrix included only those competencies from the COP and MINSA profiles that were directly related to the graduate profiles of the academic programs analyzed (Table 2).

DISCUSSION

Graduate profiles are developed based on the institutional educational model to guide the training of pro-

fessionals toward optimal performance that enables their integration into the labor market (10). The importance of a structured and systematized curriculum is emphasized, one that is aligned with the conceptual, procedural, and attitudinal components of the graduate profile (11).

The graduate profiles of Dentistry and Stomatology programs most frequently include clinical competency, which is considered essential in professional practice and is related to the ability to diagnose oral diseases and develop comprehensive treatment and healthcare plans. This competency integrates clinical knowledge, skills, and attitudes to effectively address health-related problems (12).

Table 2. Alignment matrix of graduate profile competencies.

Graduate profile competencies*	Profile of the Dental Association of Peru	Profile of the Ministry of Health
Clinical competency	Provide stomatological health care services	Evaluation and rehabilitation of the stomatognathic system
Research	Generation of knowledge	Generation of new knowledge
Critical analysis		
Management	Management of health services	-----
Promotion	-----	Promoting behavior change
Community	-----	Individual- and population-level health interventions
Environment	-----	
Communication	-----	Professional relationships with the individual, family, and community
Humanistic approach	-----	Influencing and motivating individuals with respect and equity
Ethics/morals	-----	Commitment to ethical practice.
Leadership	-----	Leadership

*In the graduate profiles of the academic programs, the competencies of empathy and foreign language proficiency did not demonstrate a significant relationship.

Another frequently reported competency was research, which facilitates the understanding of oral health problems, the refinement of interventions, and the dissemination of evidence-based information. Research competency is defined as the ability to design and implement a research project and to generate new knowledge supported by scientific evidence (13).

In the professional profile established by COP, an explicit competency labeled as ethics/morals is not mentioned; however, this dimension may be implicitly embedded in regulatory compliance and responsible professional practice. For its part, the Ministry of Health (MINSA) emphasizes commitment to the well-being and health of individuals, as well as ethical and professional conduct. In this regard, ethics in dentistry encompasses specific principles and values that are actively and systematically taught within the curriculum (14).

The least frequently mentioned competencies in the graduate profiles were empathy and foreign language. This low frequency may be partly related to the fact that these competencies are not explicitly included in the reference frameworks used for alignment (COP/MINSA). Nevertheless, at present, both competencies are highly relevant to the professional performance of the stomatologist. According to the Royal Spanish Academy (RAE) (15), empathy is based on the ability to identify with someone and share their feelings. Therefore, its importance is evident in patient care, where patients should be given greater confidence and security (14).

Competencies such as leadership, empathy, teamwork, and communication are fundamental for future professionals, as they strengthen interpersonal development both with patients and within the workplace. On the other hand, competencies related to communication, comprehensive care, and a humanistic approach show a significant presence in graduate profiles across Latin America (9), in contrast to the findings of this study.

Proficiency in a foreign language, particularly English, is considered critically important for accessing advanced knowledge, as most up-to-date scientific publications are available in that language. Consequently, English has become the universal language of science (16).

In a study conducted by the Latin American Project for Convergence in Dental Education (PLACEO), which evaluated 219 dental schools, the most frequently identified competencies were oral problem-solving (89.0%; $n = 196$), ethics and moral values (80.0%; $n = 176$), and the promotion of oral health (73.0%; $n = 162$) (9). Although this study identified competencies within graduate profiles, it is possible to compare them with the findings of the PLACEO study, revealing that the most frequently mentioned competency was clinical competency or oral problem-solving.

Research was identified as one of the most recurrent competencies (85.19%), in contrast to the findings reported by PLACEO (48.0%). This difference may be attributed to several factors. On the one hand, Uni-

versity Law No. 30220 (17) establishes students' right to receive quality academic education that includes research training, and it also establishes the thesis as a modality for obtaining the professional degree. In addition, Law No. 31520, which amends the University Law, mandates the inclusion of the course "Research Project" during the final year of study in all academic programs (18). On the other hand, university licensing, which is mandatory for institutional operation, includes requirements that strengthen research, such as policies, qualified faculty, infrastructure, and scientific publications, among others (19).

Among the limitations of the study, it was identified that the graduate profiles, after being collected directly from institutional websites, may be outdated or correspond to versions created for advertising or informational purposes, and therefore may not be reliable. In this regard, studies need to be conducted to assess compliance with the proposed graduate profiles in the

various study programs, to identify the actual profile of the dentist responsible for oral health in our country.

CONCLUSIONS

The most frequent competencies identified in the graduate profiles of Stomatology and Dentistry programs were those related to the clinical and research domains, followed by ethics/morals, whereas empathy was the least frequently mentioned. The identification of these competencies contributes to promoting a balance between clinical and research skills and those oriented toward patient and community relationships, in alignment with the requirements established by the Peruvian Dental Association (COP) and the Ministry of Health (MINSA). In addition, the results highlight the importance of strengthening humanistic competencies and updating graduate profiles in accordance with current professional and societal demands.

Conflict of interest:

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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Ethics approval:

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Authorship contribution:

LAVL, GDWH, LDZR: conceptualization, formal analysis, research, methodology, resources, software, visualization, writing of the original draft.

MBCL: conceptualization, data curation, project administration, resources, supervision, validation, writing - review & editing.

Corresponding author:

Luis Daniel Zuñiga Rodriguez

✉ luis.zuniga@upch.pe

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