

Communicative Skills in Dental Training in Chile: Some Key Curriculum Points

Las competencias comunicativas en la formación odontológica en Chile: algunas claves curriculares

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ABSTRACT

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Communication skills and interpersonal skills are fundamental in dental training, especially in clinical contexts where the professional-patient relationship directly affects the quality of care. The objective of this study was to comparatively analyze the incorporation of communication and key factors such as empathy and assertiveness in the dentistry programs of eight Chilean universities. This study corresponds to the qualitative phase of a larger mixed-methods research project, which included a quantitative stage and is aimed at designing an educational resource to strengthen communication skills in the dentist-patient relationship. A qualitative documentary study was developed using thematic analysis, following the approach proposed by Braun and Clarke. In order to identify the main training dimensions, according to the stated curriculum, publicly available graduate profiles and curricula were reviewed. The results show a heterogeneous incorporation of communication skills in the programs analyzed. Some universities have explicit training strategies aimed at developing clinical communication, empathy, and qualitative feedback in practical contexts, while others address these dimensions implicitly or in a less systematic way. Convergences in training intentions were identified, along with significant divergences in the degree of curricular operationalization. The comparative analysis identified opportunities for improvement to strengthen the explicit and assessable integration of communication skills in dental training, providing relevant input for the enhancement of explicit teaching of interpersonal communication strategies in a clinical context.

RESUMEN

Palabras clave:

Competencias comunicativas, formación odontológica, empatía, asertividad

Las competencias comunicativas y las habilidades interpersonales son fundamentales en la formación odontológica, especialmente en contextos clínicos donde la relación profesional-paciente incide directamente en la calidad de la atención. El objetivo de este estudio fue analizar comparativamente la incorporación de la comunicación, y factores clave como la empatía y la asertividad, en los programas de odontología de ocho universidades chilenas. Este estudio corresponde a la fase cualitativa de una investigación mayor de enfoque mixto, que incluyó una etapa cuantitativa y que se orienta al diseño de un recurso educativo destinado a fortalecer las habilidades comunicativas en la relación odontólogo-paciente. Se desarrolló un estudio cualitativo de tipo documental mediante análisis temático, siguiendo el enfoque propuesto por Braun y Clarke. Con el objetivo de identificar las principales dimensiones formativas, según el currículo declarado, se revisaron perfiles de egreso y mallas curriculares disponibles públicamente. Los resultados evidencian una incorporación heterogénea de las competencias comunicativas en los programas analizados. Algunas universidades presentan estrategias formativas explícitas orientadas al desarrollo de la comunicación clínica, la empatía y la retroalimentación cualitativa en contextos prácticos, mientras que otras abordan estas dimensiones de forma implícita o poco sistematizada. Se identificaron convergencias en la intencionalidad formativa, junto con divergencias relevantes en el grado de operacionalización curricular. El análisis comparativo permitió identificar oportunidades de mejora para fortalecer la integración explícita y evaluable de las competencias comunicativas en la formación odontológica, aportando insumos relevantes para la puesta en valor de la enseñanza explícita de estrategias de comunicación interpersonal en contexto clínico.

Introduction

Effective communication between healthcare professionals and patients has become increasingly important in recent decades, particularly in clinical fields such as dentistry, where interpersonal interaction directly affects the quality of care, treatment adherence, and patient satisfaction. In this context, various academic and professional organizations have advocated for the explicit inclusion of communication skills in the graduate profiles and curricula of dental programs, recognizing them as an essential component of professional training (Palomares et al., 2021).

The literature in the field of healthcare has shown that communication skills—both verbal and nonverbal—play a central role in building trust, empathy, and a strong therapeutic relationship (Knapp & Hall, 2020; Burgoon et al., 2017). In dentistry, the dentist–patient relationship has been approached through various models of clinical interaction, incorporating aspects specific to professional practice, such as the provision of information, informed consent, and behavior modification strategies (González et al., 2015; Yamalik, 2005a, 2005b, 2005c; Pizzi de Parra, 2014). These approaches agree that communication goes beyond the mere transmission of technical information and is a cornerstone of quality healthcare.

Within this framework, assertive communication is recognized as a key competency for the development of empathetic, ethical, and patient-centered clinical practices (Orsini & Jerez, 2014; Morchón, 2018; Rodas, 2023). The literature has described various communication styles, such as assertive, passive, and aggressive, and has emphasized the importance of promoting assertive behavior through specific training strategies applicable to the dental setting (Caballo, 2009; Castanyer, 2014; García-Grau et al., 2019). In this way, assertiveness emerges as a cross-cutting skill that integrates the relational, pedagogical, and ethical dimensions of professional practice.

However, several studies point to persistent weaknesses in the communication skills of dental students, as well as inconsistent integration of these skills into curricula, which has led to the development of programs and approaches aimed at strengthening them (Palomares et al., 2021). In this regard, conceptual frameworks related to communication for behavior change, communication for development, and health promotion have gained prominence, as they emphasize participatory and educational approaches in health education (Lie, 2008). These approaches are combined with active methodologies, such as modeling, feedback, and positive reinforcement, for teaching communication skills in clinical settings (Rodas, 2023).

Despite these advances, there remains limited comparative evidence regarding how communication skills are articulated and implemented in the learning outcomes and curricula of dental programs, particularly in Latin American contexts. In response to this gap, this study—which forms part of the qualitative phase of a doctoral research project—aims to conduct a comparative analysis of the integration of communication, empathy, and assertiveness into the dentistry programs at eight Chilean universities, with the goal of generating relevant insights for the design of educational proposals aimed at strengthening specific training regarding the dentist–patient relationship.

Method

Study Design

A qualitative, documentary, and comparative study was conducted as part of the qualitative phase of a mixed-methods research project. The study was designed to analyze

the integration of communication and interpersonal skills into dental programs at Chilean universities through a systematic review of official institutional documents.

Documentary Corpus and Units of Analysis

The corpus consisted of public and official documents from eight Chilean universities that offer a degree program in dentistry: Finis Terrae University, Universidad del Desarrollo, University of Concepción, Andrés Bello University, Pontifical Catholic University of Chile, University of Chile, University of La Frontera, and University of Santiago de Chile. These universities were selected because they currently offer undergraduate programs in dentistry and have officially approved curriculum documents publicly available on their institutional websites, thereby ensuring comparability and traceability of the documents.

The corpus of documents analyzed is as follows:

- *UNAB Educational Model* (Andrés Bello University, 2024)
- *Dentistry* [Admissions Brochure] (University of Chile, 2024)
- *UdeC 2024 Institutional Educational Model* (University of Concepción, 2025)
- *UDD Santiago Dentistry Curriculum*. (University of Development, 2025)
- *Finis Transforma Educational Model* (Finis Terrae University, 2025)
- *USACH Institutional Educational Model* (University of Santiago de Chile, 2014)
- *UC Dentistry Curriculum* (Pontifical Catholic University of Chile, 2025)
- *Curriculum and Course Catalog for the Dentistry Program* (Universidad de la Frontera, 2025)

Two complementary units of analysis were defined:

- a) graduate profiles, which are considered formal expressions of the competencies and educational hallmarks established by each institution; and
- b) educational pathways (curriculum frameworks).

Analysis Procedure

The documents were examined using thematic analysis, following the approach proposed by Braun and Clarke (2021), adapted to the comparative purpose of the study. This procedure was applied differently to each unit of analysis, while maintaining common criteria of consistency and comparability.

Analysis of Training Pathways

During an initial phase of familiarization with the data, we conducted a thorough review of the educational curricula of the eight universities included in the study, with the aim of identifying references related to the development of communication skills, empathy, assertiveness, and qualitative assessment in dental education.

Subsequently, initial codes were generated based on categories defined in advance according to the research objectives: graduate profile, empathy, assertiveness, and qualitative assessment. For each category, operational indicators were established, such as courses, clinical modules, professional practice opportunities, and clinical rotations, incorporating synonyms or equivalent terms identified during the preliminary review.

During the search, review, and topic-definition phases, relevant text excerpts were identified, the internal consistency of the codes was verified, and the dimensions were redefined using an operational approach focused on comparative analysis across institutions.

Analysis of Graduate Profiles

The specific thematic analysis of the graduate profiles of the participating institutions began with a familiarization phase, which made it possible to identify preliminary similarities and differences in the educational approaches stated by each institution.

Based on a systematic review of the literature, a set of recurring initial codes emerged, including: ethics and professionalism; teamwork and interdisciplinarity;

management and administration; communication; health prevention and promotion; social and community engagement; research and innovation; and comprehensive and continuing education.

These codes were grouped into preliminary cross-institutional themes, which were reviewed and cross-checked against the original data to ensure internal consistency and differentiation among universities. Finally, five key comparative themes were identified: science and evidence as a foundation; ethics, leadership, and professionalism; social and community engagement; management of professional practice; and research and innovation in dentistry.

Summary and Organization of Information

The coded data was organized into comparative matrices, which made it possible to systematize the findings across the universities analyzed, prioritizing concise descriptions based on verifiable documentary evidence. This process facilitated the subsequent identification of commonalities, differences, and opportunities for improvement in dental education.

Ethical Considerations

The study was based exclusively on the analysis of publicly available institutional documents, without involving human participants or sensitive data. For this reason, approval from an ethics committee was not required, and the responsible and academic use of the analyzed information was ensured at all times. It is important to note that Chilean institutions of higher education (HEIs) are governed by specific regulations regarding access to information, which must be made public, kept up to date, and verifiable. These requirements, among others, are overseen by the Superintendency of Higher Education (SES). Given this circumstance, this desk study did not require any special authorizations.

Regarding the use of generative artificial intelligence (gAI) models, the article was based on relevant sections of the lead author's doctoral dissertation, a study that utilized the *ChatGPT* software from *OpenAI* to collect, systematize, and organize the documentation, cross-referencing it with the original digital versions obtained from institutional websites. However, for this publication, the data used was extracted from Microsoft Excel spreadsheets created for this purpose.

Results

The analysis identified five cross-cutting themes that underpin the reported dental education curriculum: research and innovation, social and community engagement, ethics and professional leadership, practice management, and holistic education.

Table 1 presents a comparative analysis of the graduate profiles of the universities included in the study. This table highlights significant differences in the stated educational priorities and in the degree to which communication skills are explicitly addressed.

Based on this initial descriptive analysis, Table 2 provides a comparative summary of the main educational priorities identified across the board, highlighting the similarities and differences among the institutions analyzed.

Using the information obtained during the coding process of the document analysis, Table 1 was created, which summarizes the main elements identified in the graduate profiles of the universities analyzed. The information was organized into three analytical columns: *university*, *graduate profile*, and *categories for analyzing the graduate profile*. Each row corresponds to an institution and includes a brief description of the graduate profile as stated in the institution's documents, along with an analytical characterization based on the categories defined for the study.

The included descriptions prioritize information explicitly contained in the reviewed sources, with the aim of maintaining traceability between the analyzed documents and the interpretation provided. In this regard, the table is presented as an original compilation, with the aim of highlighting the interpretive nature of the analysis, which is based on documentary evidence.

This procedure made it possible to construct a systematic comparative matrix, grounded in the methodological rigor of thematic analysis, which facilitates the identification of similarities and differences in the educational emphases present in the graduate profiles of the dental programs reviewed.

Table 1

Qualitative analysis of the graduate profiles of the dentistry programs at the universities studied

No.	University	Graduate Profile	Categories of graduate profile analysis
1	U. Finis Terrae	<p>A dentist from Finis Terrae University is a professional whose evidence-based scientific and technical training enables them to address common oral health issues affecting individuals and communities by demonstrating leadership and creativity. It carries out initiatives to promote, protect, and restore health within its area of jurisdiction. He is prepared to work with other healthcare professionals, demonstrating strong communication skills, sound ethical principles, and unwavering respect for applicable legal, biosafety, and environmental regulations.</p>	<p>Focus: The program is evidence-based and focuses on science and technology, with an emphasis on individual and community oral health.</p> <p>Skills: It fosters leadership skills, creativity, and teamwork with other healthcare professionals. It emphasizes ethics, compliance with regulations, and biosafety.</p> <p>Vision: Focused on promoting and restoring health, as well as respecting legal and environmental frameworks.</p>
2	University of Development (UDD)	<p>The graduate profile for dentists is expressed in terms of competencies that combine attributes related to knowledge, understanding, practical skills, and personal qualities, all of which enable graduates to perform the duties inherent to the profession. These competencies are categorized as general and specific.</p> <p>By acquiring the competencies outlined in this graduate profile, our graduates will be independent professionals with an innovative, comprehensive, and up-to-date perspective on dentistry, backed by a solid scientific foundation. They will be focused on promotion and prevention, equipped with problem-solving skills applicable to both individual and group settings through work in multidisciplinary teams, and will demonstrate a commitment to social issues and a sense of responsibility for the health of the community.</p> <p>Contributes to the generation of new knowledge by conducting or participating in research projects. In addition, it manages human, material, and</p>	<p>Focus: A comprehensive education that combines scientific knowledge with practical skills applicable in a variety of contexts, using an innovative and up-to-date approach.</p> <p>Skills: Emphasis is placed on autonomy, problem-solving at both the individual and group levels, and working in multidisciplinary teams.</p> <p>Vision: It promotes social commitment and responsibility for the health of the community.</p> <p>Focus: It strengthens knowledge generation and research, with a focus on</p>

3	University of Concepción	technological resources with the aim of continuously improving the quality of dental care.	improving the quality of dental care.
4	Andrés Bello University (UNAB)	<p>Dental surgeons from Andrés Bello University are professionals with a solid scientific, clinical, and ethical foundation that enables them to engage in health promotion, prevention, and diagnosis of diseases and conditions affecting the stomatognathic system, as well as to treat and rehabilitate the most common complications found in the general population, based on available scientific evidence.</p> <p>Manages and oversees their professional practice to provide high-quality clinical care and applies scientific methods to help resolve health issues.</p>	<p>Skills: Skills in resource management and applied research in the field of dentistry.</p> <p>Vision: Focused on innovation and the continuous improvement of clinical practice through research.</p> <p>Focus: A solid foundation in scientific, clinical, and ethical training, with a strong focus on health promotion and the treatment of common conditions.</p> <p>Skills: It emphasizes the management and administration of professional practice based on scientific evidence.</p> <p>Vision: It offers a well-rounded education that balances clinical care with the resolution of health issues through an ethical approach.</p>
5	Pontifical Catholic University of Chile (PUC)	<p>Graduates must also possess strong communication and leadership skills, be committed to continuing their education, and uphold firm ethical and moral principles. Their professional work will be centered on patients, their families, the community, and the nation's health needs, grounded in evidence and the University's values.</p> <p>Domains</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UC Identity. • Critical thinking. • Professionalism and ethics. • Communication. • Health promotion. • Administration and management. • Basic and biomedical sciences. • Clinical knowledge and skills. 	<p>Focus: Comprehensive training that focuses not only on technical skills, but also on leadership, ethics, and a commitment to public health.</p> <p>Skills: Communication skills, critical thinking, professionalism, and ethics, with a strong emphasis on health promotion and administration.</p> <p>Vision: Focused on the patient, their family, and the community, with an emphasis on improving public health and a strong ethical framework.</p>
6	University of Chile	<p>The Graduate Profile for Dental Surgeons at the University of Chile (Title VI. Article 46 states that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A healthcare professional with training in science, technology, and the humanities • Demonstrate competencies in promoting health, preventing, diagnosing, and treating 	<p>Focus: An education in science, technology, and the humanities, with a clear commitment to society and the community.</p> <p>Skills: Skills in diagnosing and treating common diseases, as</p>

		<p>common oral and maxillofacial diseases in the population</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Please notify the appropriate office where you are assigned• Manage and run your professional practice• It helps address the country's health issues and needs at the individual, family, and community levels by applying the biopsychosocial model• Works in interdisciplinary teams	<p>well as working in interdisciplinary teams.</p> <p>Vision: A comprehensive approach, applying a biopsychosocial model and contributing to the resolution of health issues at the national level.</p>
7	University of La Frontera	<p>The purpose of the Dentistry program at the University of La Frontera is to prepare professionals with a solid scientific foundation and a strong ethical and humanistic background, enabling them to play an active role within the healthcare team and to carry out preventive care, diagnosis, treatment, and rehabilitation of common problems of the stomatognathic system, both in individuals and in the community.</p> <p>They must be a professional capable of working as part of a general healthcare team and leading an oral health team.</p> <p>Dental surgeons will incorporate a strong community focus into their practice, particularly in the areas of preventive care for the stomatognathic system and community education.</p> <p>Dental surgeons who graduate from the Universidad de la Frontera must possess a strong and consistent ability to engage in continuous self-education and, at the same time, demonstrate a commitment to education in all their actions. Graduates should understand human and social behavior so that they can balance technical and human considerations in their individual professional practice and within the healthcare team, all within an ethical framework.</p>	<p>Focus: Scientific and ethical training with a strong community focus, centered on oral health prevention and education.</p> <p>Skills: Development of skills in continuous self-directed learning and leadership within healthcare teams.</p> <p>Vision: A focus on prevention and community education, striking a balance between technical and human aspects.</p>
8	University of Santiago, Chile (USACH)	<p>He or she is a healthcare professional with training in science, technology, and the humanities. Demonstrate the skills needed to promote health, prevent, diagnose, and treat common oral and maxillofacial diseases in the population. Please notify your supervisor accordingly.</p>	<p>Focus: A well-rounded education that encompasses science, technology, and the humanities.</p> <p>Skills: Expertise in the prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of oral and maxillofacial diseases, with an emphasis on effective communication.</p> <p>Vision: Aligned with public health and focused on addressing prevalent problems at the population level.</p>

Note: Compiled by the author based on a review of institutional graduate profiles, 2025

Table 2 provides a comparative overview of these educational focuses, grouping universities according to the aspects that are most prominent in their graduate profiles.

In order to identify the main educational orientations present in the dental programs analyzed, a qualitative comparison was conducted of the graduate profiles stated by the universities included in the study. This analysis made it possible to identify similarities and differences in the educational priorities that each institution outlines regarding the professional training of dentists.

Based on a review of these profiles, five analytical dimensions were identified that underpin the main educational priorities: a focus on research, social engagement, ethics and leadership, professional practice and management, and holistic education. These dimensions emerge from an interpretive analysis of institutional documents and make it possible to summarize the pedagogical principles that guide dental education at various universities.

Table 2

General Qualitative Comparison of University Graduation Profiles

Focus on Research	Social Commitment	Ethics and Leadership	Professional Practice and Management	Comprehensive Training
<p>UDEC and the University of Chile:</p> <p>They are distinguished by their emphasis on research and the generation of new knowledge.</p>	<p>UDD and U. de la Frontera:</p> <p>They have a greater focus on community work and social responsibility.</p>	<p>PUC:</p> <p>It places a strong emphasis on ethical principles and leadership skills.</p>	<p>UNAB and USACH</p> <p>They highlight the importance of administration and management in dental practice.</p>	<p>FINIS TERRAE UNIVERSITY, THE PUC, AND THE UNIVERSITY OF CHILE:</p> <p>They offer a comprehensive educational approach that combines scientific, humanistic, and ethical perspectives.</p>

Note: Compiled by the author based on the study's findings (2025).

A comparative analysis of the graduate profiles reveals differences in educational focus among the universities examined, although certain points of convergence are also identified regarding the comprehensive training of dentists. In particular, some institutions are known for their focus on scientific research and knowledge generation, while others prioritize social engagement and community service as central pillars of their educational mission. In addition, there are programs that place greater emphasis on the development of ethical principles and leadership skills, as well as programs that explicitly incorporate competencies related to management and administration in dental practice. Taken together, these findings reflect the diversity of pedagogical approaches in dental education in Chile, highlighting different ways of integrating scientific, social, ethical, and professional dimensions into the graduate profiles of the programs analyzed.

Analysis of Educational Pathways (Curriculum Frameworks)

In the analysis of the training programs presented in Table 3, we examined the presence of communication skills related to the development of interpersonal skills relevant to clinical practice, particularly empathy and assertiveness. These competencies were identified as key analytical categories due to their recognized contribution to the quality

of the professional–patient relationship and the effectiveness of communication in healthcare settings.

In order to determine how these skills are incorporated into undergraduate dental education, we reviewed the educational curriculum—that is, the sequence (structure) of curricular activities that make up the program—as well as the course descriptions from the eight selected universities. The analysis made it possible to identify those curricular components, courses, modules, or training activities in which the development of these communication skills is explicitly stated or implied.

Table 3 provides a summary of the results of this analysis, indicating for each university the curricular components that promote the development of empathy and assertiveness within the educational program.

Table 3

Analysis of educational pathways in relation to the development of empathy and assertiveness in dental programs

No.	University	Empathy	Assertiveness
1	Finis Terrae University	The Finis Terrae curriculum emphasizes public health and effective communication from the very first semesters, with courses such as "Public Health I" and "Effective Communication." These subjects help students understand the socioeconomic and cultural context of their patients, fostering empathy during treatment	The development of assertiveness is incorporated through integrated modules and clinical simulations that require students to interact with real and simulated scenarios. "Integration Module I" includes communication components that reinforce these skills
2	University of Development (UDD)	UDD includes courses such as "Clinical Psychology" and "Oral Communication" to develop interpersonal skills, which are essential for empathy in the doctor-patient relationship. In addition, students participate in early clinical activities that connect them with the community and foster an understanding of patients' emotions	Courses such as "Critical Thinking" and "Critical Reading" provide students with the tools to make informed decisions, which helps them interact with patients more assertively
3	University of Concepción	"Community Dentistry" and public health courses provide opportunities for students to interact with different communities, fostering greater sensitivity to patients' individual and collective needs and promoting empathy	The UdeC promotes assertiveness through clinical activities with adolescents and adults, particularly at the "Integrated Adolescent Clinic," where students must be direct yet sensitive in their interactions with adolescent patients
4	Andrés Bello University (UNAB)	UNAB emphasizes the development of empathy through courses such as "Ethics and Psychology" and "Health Promotion and Education," which prepare students to better understand the emotional and social needs of their patients, fostering an empathetic relationship	The courses "Critical Thinking" and "Public Health II" promote effective decision-making and clear communication skills, while strengthening assertiveness in both clinical and non-clinical settings
5	Pontifical Catholic	The PUC curriculum features public health courses starting in the early years, which encourage early engagement with the community. In addition, courses such as "Health Communication" emphasize	Training in critical thinking and clear communication is incorporated into clinical modules where students must make quick and effective decisions.

	University of Chile (PUC)	the importance of empathy when interacting with patients.	
6	University of Chile	The University of Chile promotes empathy through its public health courses and ethics workshops, where students learn about patients' social contexts and how these influence healthcare.	Assertiveness skills are developed through hands-on practice at the "Comprehensive Dental Clinic," where students must communicate directly with patients and their families in complex clinical situations.
7	University of La Frontera	The "Public Health and Well-being" course fosters empathy, preparing students to interact with diverse social groups and understand their patients' needs.	In the clinical setting, the practicum at "Clínica Integral" requires students to develop assertiveness when interacting with patients of all ages.
8	University of Santiago, Chile (USACH)	USACH places a strong emphasis on "Public Health" and "Health Communication," which fosters an empathetic understanding of patients from the very beginning.	Courses in management and leadership incorporated into the curriculum reinforce assertive decision-making and the ability to communicate clearly with patients.

An analysis of educational pathways shows that communication skills related to empathy and assertiveness are incorporated into dental programs through various curricular strategies. In some cases, these skills are developed through courses focused on public health and clinical communication, while in others they are integrated into clinical modules, simulation activities, or interdisciplinary training sessions. These findings suggest that, while there is growing recognition of the importance of communication skills in dental education, their integration into the curriculum varies in terms of how explicitly and systematically they are addressed across the institutions analyzed.

Discussion and Conclusions

The results of the qualitative analysis provide deeper insight into how communication skills are integrated into dental education at the institutional level, revealing a varied degree of incorporation across the dental programs analyzed. These findings are consistent with previous research, which has highlighted significant differences among institutions in terms of curriculum design, teaching strategies, and assessment methods related to clinical communication (Palomares et al., 2021).

The consistent presence of values such as empathy, respect, and assertiveness in graduate profiles confirms the views expressed by various authors regarding the central role of communication in the dentist-patient relationship (Yamalík, 2005a, 2005b, 2005c; González et al., 2015). However, the results of this study show that this value statement.

From a communication perspective, the emphasis placed on empathy and interpersonal communication is consistent with the findings of Knapp and Hall (2020) and Burgoon et al. (2017), who highlight the role of verbal and nonverbal communication in building the therapeutic relationship. However, an analysis of graduate profiles reveals a mixed picture regarding these skills at the declarative level, suggesting that their integration into dental education may not be fully articulated or systematized. Since this study focused on a documentary review of the profiles rather than a detailed examination of the curricula or assessment strategies, these findings should be interpreted as indications of potential educational gaps that require specific curricular research.

With regard to assertiveness, the findings reinforce its nature as a cross-cutting competency that integrates ethical, relational, and professional dimensions of dental practice, as proposed by Orsini and Jerez (2014), Caballo (2009), and Castanyer (2014). However, the variability observed among institutions in terms of their educational integration underscores the need to move toward educational models that systematically incorporate active strategies, such as modeling, feedback, and behavioral training, in line with the recommendations of García-Grau et al. (2019) and Rodas (2023).

Furthermore, the diversity of institutional characteristics identified in the graduate profiles—with varying emphases on research, social engagement, management, or leadership—reflects the tension described in the literature between scientific and technical excellence and the social responsibility of health professionals (Lie, 2008). In this regard, clinical communication emerges as an integrating framework that allows these dimensions to be brought together, provided it is approached through explicit and context-specific pedagogical approaches.

This study provided a comparative analysis of the integration of communication skills into the dentistry programs at eight Chilean universities, using a qualitative documentary approach. The results show that, although communication, empathy, and assertiveness are widely recognized as key components of dental education, their integration into the curriculum varies significantly, with marked differences in the degree to which they are explicitly addressed, systematized, and assessed across the institutions analyzed.

An analysis of graduate profiles revealed that communication skills are often cited as educational values, but they are not always accompanied by specific teaching strategies or assessment tools to ensure their progressive development in clinical settings. This gap between educational objectives and their implementation in the curriculum is a significant finding, as it limits students' actual opportunities to acquire and develop communication skills in their professional practice.

Furthermore, the diversity of institutional approaches—each with a distinct emphasis on research, social engagement, management, or leadership—influences how clinical communication is addressed within these programs, underscoring the need to move toward educational approaches that coherently integrate the technical, relational, and ethical dimensions of dental practice.

As for the curricula that make up the dentistry program at these same eight Chilean universities, empathy and assertiveness are typically addressed explicitly through courses in public health and health communication, as well as through integrative modules and clinical rotations that include feedback. The most common training methods for empathy include introductory communication courses and early engagement with the community; for assertiveness, clinical simulations, integrated modules, and activities that require decision-making in real-world contexts are particularly effective.

In general terms, the study's findings indicate that training in communication skills in dentistry in the Chilean context lacks consistent and explicit integration into the curriculum. While there is widespread recognition of their importance, challenges remain in defining clear training guidelines and implementing systematic pedagogical strategies that will strengthen these skills in a way that is both measurable and contextually relevant.

From this perspective, the study provides relevant empirical evidence supporting the need to design and implement educational resources aimed at strengthening communication skills in dental education, with a particular focus on the dentist–patient relationship and the current demands of professional practice.

One of the main limitations of the study is its exclusive reliance on publicly available institutional documents, which prevents the reported information from being compared with the training practices actually implemented in the classroom and in clinical settings. Furthermore, the analysis is limited to a specific group of Chilean universities, which restricts the generalizability of the results to other educational contexts.

As part of our ongoing efforts, we propose to supplement the literature review with empirical studies that incorporate the perspectives of students and teachers, as well as direct evaluations of teaching strategies aimed at developing communication skills. Similarly, future studies could examine in greater depth the impact of specific educational resources on the quality of clinical communication and the dentist-patient relationship at different levels of training.

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