

ASSESSMENT OF LEARNING OUTCOMES AND GRADUATE SATISFACTION IN ACCREDITED DENTAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS IN GEORGIA

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INTRODUCTION

Our study examines the effectiveness of accredited dental education programs in Georgia by evaluating the learning outcomes, professional preparedness, and satisfaction levels of graduates. Dental education plays a critical role in the preparation of qualified healthcare professionals, and the quality of educational programs directly influences the competence of future dentists. As the field of dentistry continues to evolve through technological advancement and evidence-based clinical practice, educational institutions are expected to adapt their curricula to meet modern international standards. In Georgia, although dental education programs are accredited and structured according to national educational requirements, there is still limited research assessing graduates' perspectives regarding the quality and effectiveness of these programs.

Our research was conducted using an electronic questionnaire distributed through Google Forms. The study involved 20 graduates from accredited dental education programs in Georgia, including 13 graduates from Batumi Shota Rustaveli State University and 7 graduates from Akaki Tsereteli State University. Both quantitative and qualitative methods were used to analyze participants' evaluations of theoretical education, practical training, technological resources, assessment systems, and professional readiness.

The findings of our study indicate that most respondents positively evaluated the theoretical component of their education and believed that the programs provided a strong academic foundation in dentistry. Graduates acknowledged the professionalism of academic staff and the accessibility of educational support. However, despite these positive aspects, significant concerns were identified regarding the limited opportunities for practical and clinical training. Many respondents reported insufficient access to supervised patient care, simulation-based learning, and modern dental technologies. Participants also emphasized

that educational programs often relied on outdated teaching methods and lacked integration of contemporary clinical protocols.

In addition to technical and practical issues, graduates highlighted deficiencies in the development of communication skills, teamwork abilities, and patient management competencies. Respondents stressed that modern dental professionals require not only theoretical knowledge and technical skills but also interpersonal competencies that enable effective interaction with patients and healthcare teams.

Our study further revealed concerns regarding the objectivity of assessment systems and the limited availability of international exchange opportunities. According to participants, increased collaboration with international institutions and improved access to modern educational resources would significantly contribute to the enhancement of dental education quality in Georgia.

Overall, the research demonstrates that accredited dental education programs in Georgia provide an adequate theoretical framework but require substantial improvements in practical training, technological integration, and curriculum modernization. The findings of this study provide valuable recommendations for educational reform and may contribute to the development of more effective, student-centered, and internationally aligned dental education programs in Georgia.

1. Theoretical part

Education is a continuous and multifaceted process that combines upbringing, intellectual development, and professional preparation. It is aimed not only at the transmission of knowledge but also at the development of practical competencies, critical thinking, ethical values, and professional responsibility. Throughout history, education has remained one of the most significant foundations for the progress of society, economic development, and the improvement of human well-being. In the modern world, where technological advancements and globalization continuously transform professional fields, the importance of high-quality education has become even more evident. This is especially true in healthcare professions, where the quality of education directly affects patient safety, treatment outcomes, and public trust in healthcare systems¹.

Medical education occupies a particularly important place within higher education systems because healthcare professionals are expected to possess not only theoretical knowledge but also advanced practical and communication skills. Among medical disciplines, dentistry represents one of the most practice-oriented professions, requiring students to master complex clinical procedures,

¹ Education – “What is Education” (2021).

diagnostic abilities, and patient-centered approaches. Consequently, the effectiveness of dental educational programs plays a crucial role in preparing competent professionals who are capable of meeting modern healthcare standards and responding to the growing demands of society^{2, 3}.

In recent years, the field of dentistry in Georgia has undergone substantial development. The number of accredited dental educational institutions and programs has increased, while modern technologies and innovative teaching methods have gradually been introduced into the educational process. Georgian dental schools are actively attempting to align their curricula with international educational standards and accreditation requirements. Despite these positive changes, limited attention has been paid to the systematic evaluation of educational quality from the perspective of students and graduates. In particular, there is insufficient research regarding how effectively accredited dental educational programs prepare students for professional practice, whether the balance between theoretical and practical training is adequate, and how satisfied graduates are with the educational experience they received during their studies.

Student satisfaction is widely recognized as one of the key indicators of educational quality. Students and graduates are directly involved in the educational process and therefore are able to evaluate both the strengths and weaknesses of educational programs. Their perceptions provide valuable information about curriculum effectiveness, teaching methods, access to clinical practice, assessment systems, learning resources, and institutional support mechanisms⁴. Evaluating students' experiences is especially important in dental education because the profession requires extensive practical training, close supervision, and continuous skill development. Identifying students' perspectives can contribute to improving teaching quality, strengthening practical components, and increasing graduates' readiness for independent professional work.

For higher education institutions to ensure comprehensive and effective education, it is essential that they implement student-centered approaches and protect students' academic rights. Student-centered education emphasizes active learning, critical thinking, practical engagement, and the adaptation of teaching methods to learners' needs. According to Article 43 of the Law of Georgia on Higher Education, students have the right to receive quality education, participate in scientific research activities, equally access university resources,

² Law of Georgia on Student Rights and Responsibilities (2024).

³ Student Rights, Responsibilities, and Personal Data Processing (2022).

⁴ Mohammed A Alqarni. Assessing Dental Students' Professional Satisfaction with Operative Dentistry Teaching and Curriculum (2021).

freely express their opinions, choose educational programs, participate in the development of individual learning pathways, and periodically evaluate academic staff performance⁵. These legal provisions underline the importance of involving students in the educational process and ensuring that educational institutions remain accountable for the quality of teaching and learning.

The quality of higher education is one of the fundamental prerequisites for building a modern, democratic, and competitive state. Educational systems contribute not only to the professional development of individuals but also to the broader social, economic, and cultural progress of a country. In Georgia, the modernization of higher education has become a strategic priority, particularly within healthcare-related disciplines. Improving educational quality and ensuring accessibility are essential for preparing qualified professionals capable of competing in international labour markets and contributing effectively to national healthcare systems⁶.

Accredited dental educational programs in Georgia are designed to provide students with both theoretical foundations and practical competencies. Theoretical education includes learning concepts, scientific principles, diagnostic methods, treatment planning, and evidence-based approaches. This component forms the intellectual basis necessary for understanding oral diseases, treatment protocols, and modern dental technologies. However, theoretical knowledge alone is insufficient for professional competence in dentistry. Therefore, practical education occupies a central role in dental training and includes laboratory exercises, simulation-based learning, clinical practice, internships, workshops, and direct patient care activities.

Practical training is particularly important because it allows students to apply theoretical knowledge in real clinical situations, develop psychomotor skills, improve decision-making abilities, and gain confidence in patient management. Clinical experience also contributes to the development of professional ethics, communication skills, teamwork, and responsibility. Modern dental education increasingly emphasizes competency-based learning, where students are expected to demonstrate practical proficiency and clinical reasoning before graduation⁷. Consequently, the quality and availability of practical training opportunities significantly influence graduates' preparedness for independent professional activity.

⁵ Strategic Development of Higher Education and Science in Georgia (2013).

⁶ National Center for Educational Quality Enhancement (2023). Sectoral Benchmark for Higher Education in Dentistry.

⁷ Marie Bryce, Sally Hanks, Daniel Zahra. Mutual Recognition of Qualifications, Health Workforce Migration, and Graduate Outcomes: A Comparative Mapping Study of Undergraduate Dental Education in Europe (2023).

Another essential component of dental educational programs is the student assessment system. Assessment methods are used not only to measure academic achievement but also to motivate learning, identify weaknesses, and ensure that students achieve required competencies. Dental educational institutions commonly utilize a combination of on-going assessments, rating systems, written examinations, oral examinations, practical evaluations, and final licensing examinations. Effective assessment systems should be transparent, objective, and aligned with learning outcomes. They should evaluate both theoretical understanding and clinical performance while encouraging continuous professional development^{8, 9, 10, 11}.

Despite the growing importance of educational quality assurance mechanisms, challenges still remain within dental education systems. These challenges may include insufficient clinical exposure, outdated teaching methods, imbalance between theoretical and practical training, limited access to modern technologies, and inconsistencies in assessment procedures. Understanding these issues through the perspectives of graduates can help educational institutions identify areas requiring improvement and adapt programs to contemporary professional standards.

The present study aims to determine the extent to which existing accredited dental educational programs in Georgia meet the challenges and demands of modern professional practice. In addition, the study seeks to evaluate how graduates assess the quality of their education and whether their experiences correspond to the academic objectives established by educational institutions. By analyzing graduates' evaluations, the research intends to identify strengths and weaknesses within current educational systems and contribute to the improvement of educational quality.

The findings of this study may provide valuable insights for universities, accreditation bodies, policymakers, and educators involved in dental education. Furthermore, the results can serve as an important foundation for refining educational strategies, enhancing practical training opportunities, improving student support systems, and strengthening accreditation standards. Ultimately, improving the quality of dental education will contribute to the preparation of competent, ethical, and highly qualified dental professionals capable of providing effective healthcare services and meeting the evolving needs of society.

⁸ Caucasus International University (2023). Georgian Educational Program in Dentistry.

⁹ Tbilisi State Medical University (2024). One-Cycle Dental Education Program.

¹⁰ Akaki Tsereteli State University (2022). Curriculum.

¹¹ Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University (2020). One-Cycle Educational Program in Dentistry (Georgian Language) – Accreditation Expert Group Report.

2. Research analyses part

The results of the present study revealed that graduates of accredited dental educational programs operating in Georgia expressed both positive evaluations and significant concerns regarding various aspects of the educational process. While many respondents acknowledged the strengths of theoretical education and the overall organization of learning, the findings also identified several important deficiencies related to practical training, technological resources, curriculum modernization, and professional preparedness. The analysis of graduates' experiences provides valuable insight into the effectiveness of current educational programs and highlights areas requiring further improvement.

1. Overall Level of Satisfaction with Educational Programs

The majority of graduates participating in the study reported that the educational programs enabled them to acquire substantial theoretical knowledge in the fundamental disciplines of dentistry. Theoretical education was generally evaluated positively, particularly in subjects related to basic medical sciences, diagnostic principles, and theoretical foundations of dental treatment. Among the respondents, 15% indicated that they were highly satisfied with the theoretical knowledge obtained during their studies, while 35% stated that they were partially satisfied. These findings suggest that a considerable proportion of graduates recognize the value of the theoretical component of the curriculum and believe that universities provide an acceptable academic basis for future professional development.

However, despite these positive evaluations, the results also demonstrated the existence of dissatisfaction among some graduates. Notably, 15% of respondents reported being completely dissatisfied with the educational program (Appendix 1). This dissatisfaction may reflect inconsistencies between educational expectations and actual learning experiences, particularly in areas related to practical skill development, modern teaching approaches, and clinical exposure. The findings indicate that although theoretical preparation is relatively strong, not all students perceive the educational process as sufficiently comprehensive or aligned with the realities of professional practice.

The practical component of dental education was evaluated more critically by graduates. Dentistry is a profession that requires the integration of theoretical understanding with extensive clinical and technical skills; therefore, practical training represents one of the most essential elements of professional preparation. According to the study results, 50% of graduates reported being only partially satisfied with the practical experience they received during their studies. Furthermore, 10% expressed complete dissatisfaction with the practical training component (Appendix 2). These findings suggest that many students consider practical opportunities to be insufficient in quantity, intensity, or quality.

Graduates frequently emphasized that clinical practice and simulation-based learning should begin earlier within the curriculum and be conducted more intensively throughout the educational process. Many respondents believed that the limited amount of supervised clinical work negatively affected their confidence and preparedness for independent professional activity after graduation. The dissatisfaction associated with practical training may also indicate limited access to modern equipment, insufficient patient interaction, inadequate supervision, or a lack of simulation models and laboratory materials.

The study also examined graduates' perceptions regarding the consistency and organization of the educational process. In response to the question, "Was the learning process consistent and goal-oriented?", 50% of respondents fully agreed that the learning process was structured, organized, and aligned with educational goals. This suggests that half of the graduates perceived the curriculum as relatively coherent and professionally directed. In addition, 40% partially agreed, indicating that while certain aspects of the educational process met expectations, some inconsistencies or organizational shortcomings remained present. Meanwhile, 10% believed that the learning process was more inconsistent than consistent (Appendix 3).

These findings demonstrate that although the majority of students positively evaluate the organizational structure of dental educational programs, there is still a need to improve curriculum coordination, communication of educational objectives, and integration between theoretical and practical learning components. Effective educational programs require not only strong academic content but also a clearly organized structure that allows students to progressively develop competencies and professional confidence.

2. Availability of Technical Equipment and Resources in Dental Educational Programs

The accessibility of academic staff and administrative support was evaluated relatively positively by graduates. Among the respondents, 75% reported that communication and collaboration with academic personnel and university administration were accessible during the educational process. Furthermore, 15% described such interaction as "easily accessible," indicating highly positive relationships and effective communication within educational institutions. These findings suggest that, in general, universities provide students with opportunities to communicate with lecturers and administrative representatives regarding academic or organizational issues.

Positive interaction between students and academic staff plays an important role in creating a supportive learning environment. Accessible lecturers and responsive administration contribute to student motivation, academic engagement, and overall satisfaction with the educational experience. Effective

communication also facilitates timely feedback, academic guidance, and resolution of educational challenges. Nevertheless, despite these positive evaluations, 10% of respondents expressed dissatisfaction and considered their interaction with academic staff and administration to be less favourable (Appendix 4). This indicates that some students may experience difficulties related to communication, support mechanisms, or institutional responsiveness.

One of the most critically evaluated aspects of dental education was the integration of modern technologies and technical resources into the learning process. Dentistry is a rapidly evolving field characterized by continuous technological advancements, including digital imaging systems, CAD/CAM technologies, simulation devices, and modern restorative materials. Therefore, access to updated technologies is essential for preparing students according to contemporary professional standards.

Despite this necessity, only 20% of graduates considered the technological and technical support provided by universities to be adequate. In contrast, 55% of respondents expressed dissatisfaction, indicating that technological resources were insufficiently integrated into the educational process. Additionally, 25% stated that they had no technological support during their studies (Appendix 5). These findings reveal a significant gap between modern professional requirements and the technological capabilities available within some educational institutions.

The lack of technological resources may negatively influence students' practical competence, adaptability, and competitiveness in the labor market. Graduates who do not receive training with modern dental equipment and materials may encounter difficulties when transitioning into professional practice. Respondents frequently noted the absence of advanced simulation systems, modern clinical instruments, updated dental materials, and digital learning technologies. Such limitations may reduce the effectiveness of practical education and restrict students' opportunities to familiarize themselves with innovations currently used in contemporary dentistry.

3. Evaluation of Learning Quality and Professional Readiness of Graduates

To evaluate overall educational quality, graduates were asked to assess their educational experience using a 5-point scale. The majority of respondents (75%) rated the quality of education with 4 points, indicating general satisfaction with the educational process and a positive perception of the programs. These findings suggest that most graduates consider their education acceptable and beneficial for professional development. At the same time, 15% assigned 3 points, reflecting a neutral attitude or the perception that improvements are necessary in certain areas. Additionally, 5% rated the quality of education with 2 points, indicating dissatisfaction, while another 5% assigned the maximum

score of 5 points, reflecting a very high level of satisfaction with the educational experience (Appendix 6).

The distribution of responses demonstrates that although graduates generally evaluate the quality of education positively, there remains considerable room for improvement. High-quality dental education should ensure the balanced development of theoretical knowledge, practical competencies, professional ethics, and communication skills. The presence of neutral and negative evaluations suggests that some graduates perceive deficiencies within educational programs that limit their academic or professional development.

Professional readiness for independent clinical practice was also assessed using a 5-point scale. The responses were distributed as follows: 1 point – 5%; 2 points – 10%; 3 points – 35%; 4 points – 40%; and 5 points – 10% (Appendix 7). These results indicate that although many graduates feel moderately or adequately prepared for professional activity, only a relatively small proportion feel fully confident and highly prepared for independent practice.

The fact that 35% of respondents selected 3 points suggests that a substantial number of graduates perceive their professional readiness as average rather than strong. This may be directly associated with the previously identified limitations in practical training and technological support. Professional confidence in dentistry is largely developed through repeated clinical practice, supervised patient interaction, and exposure to real clinical situations. Therefore, limited practical opportunities may contribute to feelings of uncertainty among graduates entering the professional field.

Nevertheless, the results also indicate that a portion of graduates feel adequately prepared for professional practice after completing their studies. The presence of positive evaluations reflects the efforts of educational institutions to provide students with essential academic foundations and clinical experiences. However, improving the balance between theoretical and practical education remains essential for strengthening graduates' professional competence and self-confidence.

4. Systemic Gaps and Recommendations for Improving Educational Programs

The analysis of responses to open-ended questions revealed several systemic gaps and challenges within accredited dental educational programs in Georgia. The most frequently mentioned issue was the lack of practical training, identified by 60% of respondents. Graduates repeatedly emphasized the need for earlier integration of clinical practice into the curriculum, greater exposure to practical activities, and more intensive development of manual and clinical skills throughout the educational process (Appendix 8).

Practical competence is one of the central requirements of the dental profession, and insufficient clinical exposure may negatively affect graduates'

preparedness for independent work. Respondents noted that limited opportunities for patient interaction and practical procedures reduced their confidence in performing clinical tasks after graduation. Many graduates recommended increasing the number of clinical hours, expanding simulation-based training, and ensuring closer supervision during practical activities.

Technological limitations were also identified as a major systemic problem. Approximately 30% of graduates stated that they lacked access to modern dental materials and equipment during their studies, which hindered their ability to meet current professional standards. Respondents emphasized that contemporary dentistry increasingly relies on digital technologies and innovative materials; therefore, universities should ensure that students are trained using modern clinical resources and updated technological systems.

Another significant issue identified by graduates was the presence of outdated curricula. According to the findings, 50% of respondents believed that some educational programs were not sufficiently aligned with modern clinical protocols and international standards. Graduates suggested that universities should regularly update curricula, integrate evidence-based approaches, and introduce contemporary treatment methods and technologies into the educational process.

Furthermore, 25% of respondents indicated that the student assessment system lacked objectivity. Some graduates expressed concerns regarding transparency, consistency, and fairness in the evaluation process. Objective assessment systems are essential for maintaining educational quality and ensuring that students are evaluated according to clearly defined competencies and learning outcomes. Respondents recommended implementing more standardized and competency-based assessment methods.

A particularly important issue identified in the study was the limited availability of international exchange programs. Approximately 65% of graduates highlighted the absence or restricted accessibility of exchange opportunities (Appendix 9). International academic exchange programs are valuable because they allow students to gain diverse clinical experiences, become familiar with international educational systems, improve communication skills, and broaden professional perspectives. Graduates emphasized that participation in exchange programs could significantly contribute to both academic and professional development.

In addition to identifying problems, respondents provided several recommendations for improving dental educational programs. Graduates expressed the need for integrating modules focused on patient communication, teamwork, leadership, and practice management. These competencies are increasingly recognized as essential components of modern healthcare professions and contribute to effective patient-centered care.

Respondents also recommended introducing courses based on updated clinical protocols and evidence-based dentistry. They emphasized the importance of ensuring access to both Georgian and international academic literature, increasing the availability of modern educational resources, and expanding opportunities for independent learning and research activities.

Moreover, graduates highlighted the necessity of increasing practical activities, providing additional dental materials and simulation models for training, and enabling supervised patient care under appropriate clinical conditions. They also stressed the importance of ensuring adequate infection control measures and safety standards for both students and patients during clinical practice.

Overall, the findings of this study demonstrate that although accredited dental educational programs in Georgia possess several strengths, including satisfactory theoretical preparation and relatively positive organizational structures, substantial improvements are still needed in practical training, technological support, curriculum modernization, and professional preparation. Addressing these systemic challenges may contribute significantly to enhancing educational quality, increasing graduate satisfaction, and preparing more competent dental professionals for future clinical practice.

CONCLUSIONS

Our study assessed the effectiveness of accredited dental education programs in Georgia by examining graduates' evaluations of theoretical instruction, practical training, technological resources, and professional preparedness. The findings of our research demonstrate that although graduates generally appreciate the theoretical education provided by universities, important shortcomings remain within the practical and organizational components of the educational process.

Most respondents positively evaluated the theoretical curriculum and recognized that universities provide fundamental academic knowledge in dentistry. Academic staff were also perceived as supportive and accessible, contributing positively to the educational environment. Nevertheless, theoretical preparation alone is insufficient for ensuring full professional competence in dentistry, which is a highly practice-oriented healthcare field.

The most critical issue identified by the study was the lack of adequate practical and clinical experience. Graduates reported that they had limited opportunities to perform supervised procedures, interact with patients, and develop practical decision-making skills. Such limitations may negatively affect graduates' confidence and readiness when entering professional practice. Therefore, strengthening practical education should become a priority for educational institutions and accreditation agencies.

Another significant finding concerns the insufficient integration of modern technologies and innovative educational methods into dental programs. Modern dentistry increasingly depends on digital systems, simulation technologies, and evidence-based treatment approaches. Universities must therefore invest in updated infrastructure, technological resources, and modern teaching strategies to ensure that students are prepared for contemporary professional challenges.

The study additionally revealed the need to improve non-technical competencies, including communication skills, teamwork, leadership, and patient management abilities. These competencies are essential for effective healthcare delivery and should be systematically integrated into educational programs through workshops, practical activities, and interdisciplinary collaboration.

The limited availability of international exchange programs and concerns regarding assessment objectivity also indicate the necessity for broader educational reforms. Universities should encourage participation in international academic networks, support student mobility opportunities, and establish transparent assessment systems focused on competency development.

In conclusion, the research confirms that accredited dental education programs in Georgia possess strong theoretical foundations but require significant modernization to fully meet contemporary international standards. Expanding clinical practice opportunities, improving access to modern technologies, strengthening communication-oriented education, and enhancing international collaboration are essential steps for improving the quality and effectiveness of dental education. The findings of this study may serve as a valuable basis for future reforms, curriculum development, and policy initiatives aimed at improving professional dental education in Georgia and ensuring the preparation of highly qualified healthcare professionals.

Based on the findings of the study, it is recommended that dental educational programs operating in Georgia undergo both structural and content-based improvements. Particular attention should be paid to strengthening practical training, as the majority of graduates identified the lack of practical experience as one of the main challenges. It is advisable to introduce clinical practice at earlier stages of education, increase the number of practical hours, and further develop simulation-based learning.

It is also important to improve access to modern technologies and dental resources in order to provide students with education that meets contemporary professional standards. In addition, assessment systems should become more objective and transparent.

Educational programs should be regularly updated according to modern clinical protocols and international standards. Furthermore, expanding international

exchange programs and professional development opportunities would significantly contribute to the academic and professional growth of students.

SUMMARY

This study examines the effectiveness of accredited dental education programs in Georgia by evaluating graduates' learning outcomes, professional preparedness, and overall satisfaction with the educational process. The research addresses the growing need to assess the quality of dental education in relation to modern international standards, technological development, and competency-based learning approaches. The study was conducted using an electronic questionnaire distributed among graduates of accredited dental programs at Batumi Shota Rustaveli State University and Akaki Tsereteli State University. The findings revealed that most graduates positively evaluated the theoretical component of their education and acknowledged the professionalism and accessibility of academic staff. However, significant concerns were identified regarding insufficient practical and clinical training, limited exposure to supervised patient care, and inadequate access to modern dental technologies and simulation-based learning. Respondents also emphasized the need for curriculum modernization, greater integration of evidence-based clinical protocols, and the development of communication, teamwork, and patient-management competencies. In addition, graduates highlighted problems related to the objectivity of assessment systems and the limited availability of international exchange opportunities.

The results demonstrate that while accredited dental education programs in Georgia provide a satisfactory theoretical foundation, substantial improvements are required in practical training, technological support, and educational innovation. The study provides recommendations for strengthening curriculum quality, enhancing clinical education, and aligning dental programs with contemporary international educational standards.

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