

## NEW PERSPECTIVE ARTICLE

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A New Challenge for Dental Education: Generation Z

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Un nuevo reto para la educación odontológica: Generación Z

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**ABSTRACT:** A new cohort, known as “Generation Z”, is nowadays studying Health Careers. These students were born between 1996 and 2012, and currently at year 2022, have between 18 and 26 years. It is necessary to comprehend their characteristics and behaviors, for a better understanding of how they learn, what do they expect from education and how to improve their academic development and potential. Generation Z is considered as the most diverse, and it requires a closer mentorship from teachers, who must be ready to help students to manage their time and resources efficiently. It is worth mentioning that Gen Z information about their professional performance is still preliminary, because they are currently studying their University programs. Thus, it will be interesting to further analyze the behavior of Generation Z in Dental Education.

**KEYWORDS:** Challenges; Dental education; Generation Z.

**ABSTRACT:** Una nueva cohorte generacional, conocida como “Generación Z”, se encuentra estudiando las Licenciaturas en el área de la Salud. Estos estudiantes nacieron entre los años de 1996 y 2012, y actualmente al año 2022, tienen entre 18 y 26 años. Es necesario comprender sus características y sus conductas, para tener un mejor entendimiento de cómo aprenden, qué esperan de la educación, y cómo se podría mejorar su desarrollo académico y su potencial. La Generación Z es conocida como la más diversa, y requiere de una mentoría cercana por parte de los profesores, quienes deben estar listos para ayudar a los estudiantes a manejar el tiempo y los recursos eficientemente. Es importante mencionar que la información referente al desempeño profesional de la Generación Z es aún preliminar, dado que actualmente

están cursando sus programas universitarios. Por tanto, será interesante seguir analizando el comportamiento de la Generación Z en la Educación Odontológica.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Educación Odontológica; Generation Z; Retos.

## INTRODUCTION

The majority of students who are currently studying or finishing University belong to the so-called "Generation Z"(1), cohort with members born between 1996 and 2012 (2). This generation is conformed of students who, as of 2022, are between the ages of 18 and 26 (3). In some Latin American countries, students of this Generation have begun to graduate from Bachelor's degrees in Health and have begun to apply to Postgraduate programs, becoming the predominant population in Universities (4,5).

Members of this Generation have begun to stand out with remarkable trajectories since their youth, whether as activists, leaders, winners of international competitions or innovators in the technological world (6). There is no doubt that outstanding health professionals will also emerge from this generation of new students.

The aim of this article is to communicate the perspectives of Generation Z within Dental Education, and to describe their characteristics, their expectations and their behaviors, with the intention of supporting their academic development and their future professional inclusion.

## PERSPECTIVES ABOUT GENERATION Z

Other terms to refer to this group are: "Gen Z", "iGeneration", "Post-Millennials" or "Centennials"(2,4). It is perceived that this group has received more influence and has more similarities with their parents, who belong to Generation X (1965-1979), and not so much with the generation

that preceded them, the Millennials (1980-1995) (3,7).

This generation is considered to be inspired to change their world as they have been involved in various unfortunate global situations in their lifetimes. The chaos and disorder they perceive in governments motivates them to get involved and make a difference in their environment (8). This new generation also wants to be prepared in the best possible way and to maximize their potential in every aspect of their lives (9).

Some attributes that have described Generation Z, and that should be considered in educational processes are:

- Easy and immediate access to information, because they were born in the technological age (the members of this generation are known as "digital natives", as they do not know the world offline)
- Great diversity in terms of race, gender and sexual orientation.
- Practicality and active problem solving.
- Entrepreneurship for justice and social equity.
- Search for a positive impact in the world.
- High value towards responsibility, ethics and independence.
- Adaptability to work environments and ease of integration with other generations (2,3,4,6,7).

On the other hand, some negative characteristics have been mentioned about this new generation, such as a low level of emotional resilience or self-confidence, which leads to insecurity and a high degree of psychological stress (1,2). In

addition, cases of depression, anxiety, self-harm and suicidal thoughts have been reported from an early age in its members (10).

## REPORTS IN OTHER HEALTH CAREERS

It is necessary to mention that the information about the University performance of Generation Z is preliminary, since they are currently studying their undergraduate programs (7). In addition, the few scientific reports that have been published in the area of Health about Gen Z students, mostly belong to Medicine and Nursing careers (4,10,11).

In the first place, it has been analyzed that the main motivations of Gen Z to study Health careers are helping and healing other people, thus demonstrating a high level of altruism, ethics and initiative to get involved in the clinical care for those in need (5,6). In addition, it has been reported that a large percentage of the students are interested in improving medical care and communication with their patients. The students themselves have recognized the need to have a broad cultural knowledge to promote better medical and human care (12).

As part of its learning tools, the indisputable need for the use of technology in health care has been described. For example, smartphones have been used to encourage dialogue between colleagues, to search information immediately, to download diagnostic images and laboratory studies, among other facilities offered by intercommunication (12).

An important point is the need for Gen Z students to find balance between their personal and academic lives and, in this way, to be able to enjoy their families and friends without being impeded by academic life (5). In the financial area, Gen Z students are aware of the need for a realistic and stable income to support them in their future life (6). Also, they are willing to save resources,

since they know the costs involved in their studies, tuition and possible debts that they may acquire when applying for scholarships or financing (13).

## TRANSCENDENCE

Knowing and understanding the motivations, abilities and expectations of the new generations of students in Health careers is of great interest to educators and admission committees, since each cohort is unique and individuals express their social and emotional dynamics in different ways (7,14,15).

The fact that Generation Z is considered the most diverse so far, requires closer mentoring from teachers, who must be ready to help the students to make better use of time and resources (1,2,7).

## GENERATION Z IN DENTAL EDUCATION

With regard to Dental Education, there have been few published articles about Generation Z. The current scenario is an intergenerational synergy, where veteran teachers belong to the Baby Boomer Generation, some other teachers are part of Generations X and Y (Millennial), and current students conform Gen Z (7,14).

This situation requires a progressive adaptation for the teachers, which represents a considerable challenge to the academic community (2). The questioning is directed to knowing if the Faculty is prepared with educational resources for the new generation (14).

It is necessary to consider the constant use of technology, effective communication and feedback techniques, in addition to the implementation of educational methods that promote creativity and well-being (2). Therefore, educators must consider that Gen Z learns in a different way and it has a unique and different vision of the world than previous generations (11).

It is important to note that, for this new generation, it will be necessary to acquire skills and not just knowledge, and that the focus should be on service and attention to the main problems of society.

Dentistry teachers must remember that the students are the center of education, and in this case, young people belonging to a new generation will have to be instructed. Despite future difficulties, educators will need to adapt to young students, being aware that some education models may change (16).

Being a professor of Health Sciences also entails a special responsibility with the new generations, since they need a close mentorship to instruct them and stimulate them to think beyond their expectations and realities. In addition, it is necessary to awaken in them the curiosity to learn and the desire to grow professionally (17). Given that Gen Z has been formed within a society that promotes diversity, inclusion and open-mindedness, it should also be considered to seek equal treatment within the students (8,18).

Among other actions, teachers will also have to develop critical thinking in students, support learning through successes and errors, develop interest and desire for research, seek social satisfaction and collaborate with students to understand each other (16). Also, it is convenient that teachers motivate them to achieve goals beyond a professional career, in order to have an adequate balance between personal life and work (5).

## KEY POINTS

Some important points to highlight from Gen Z in Health careers, that should be considered for Dental Education, are:

1. Dependence on technology and communication through social networks. It is said that their life is attached to electronic devices (6,7).
2. Although they have short attention spans, they develop high levels of intelligence quotient and sensory coordination (7).
3. They learn better through observation and practice (7).
4. They expect to have personalized experiences with available resources all the time, in addition to constant feedback (2).
5. Innovative thinking and spirit of exploration (2).
6. Demand for instant information, since the world they perceive moves quickly and has immediate action (6,14).
7. They consider themselves as realistic, with a vision of making a difference in their environment and in the world (19).
8. They give high importance to flexibility and being heard (19).

Finally, it must be considered that their preparation at Universities will be a platform that drives them towards a successful professional life in Dentistry (20).

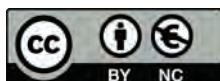
## CONCLUSION

In Dental Education, it is important to be aware of the motivations, values and passions of the new students to reinforce the academic commitment of the professors towards them, and adapt the teaching methods for the new generations. In addition, it is of great interest to carry

out future studies and educational interventions to learn about the performance of Generation Z in Dentistry.

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