



## ORIGINAL RESEARCH PAPER

# THE IMAGE OF A PHYSICAL EDUCATION TEACHER AS SEEN BY SCHOOL COMMUNITY

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## Abstract

*The aim of the research was to get to know the image of physical education (PE) teachers as seen by themselves and to compare it with how it is perceived by school community. The study included 148 teachers and 171 final-year students from upper-secondary schools. As a result of purposive sampling and random-purposive sampling, three groups were distinguished. The groups included PE teachers (n=22), teachers of other subjects (n=22) and students (n=22). The data were gathered using ACL-37 (Adjective Check List) developed by G. Gough and A. B. Heilbrun. The findings revealed a number of significant differences between how PE teachers perceive themselves and how they are seen by their students and colleagues (teachers of other subjects). It turned out that PE teachers perceive themselves in a more positive manner than the other groups.*

**Key words:** *image, PE teacher, students, teachers, school community, relations.*

## Introduction

The quality of teaching is a crucial matter of national identity and an element that contributes to social and economic development. Changes resulting from the globalisation process have brought about evolution in youth education. Currently even great skills and professional knowledge of physical education (PE) teachers may be insufficient to teach and educate effectively (Arrighi & Young, 1987) and to instil the need to perform physical activity continually after finishing education (Rink & Hall, 2008). These days, apart from formal preparation and experience, one of the working tools of teachers is their image in school community. The image is created in consciousness individually on the basis of personal experience

gained through interactions and opinions of external environment (mass media, friends, family, etc.) (Kestere et al., 2013). The image of a given professional group is the way they are perceived by members of another group, which translates directly into relations as well as attitude towards them. School environment and its atmosphere are essential factors that motivate students and teachers (Skinner & Belmont, 1993). Some elements of the environment and its atmosphere are created by peers, while the other ones are formed by teachers through e.g. evaluation system, task levels or their performance methods (Smuka, 2012). Students who experience positive atmosphere in class and school and are treated by their teachers in a democratic way learn better, acquire knowledge and values more easily and shape their own identity consciously (Banks, 2008). How teachers are perceived is a significant factor that influences relations and atmosphere in a school community. Miron (1983) and Dressel (1987) indicate that the image of 'a good teacher' consists of such elements as (1) knowledge, (2) organisational and methodology skills as well as (3) relations between a teacher and a student. Duvivier et al. (2009) point to (1) personality traits, (2) qualifications and (3) strategies (ability to put knowledge into practice), whereas Barone (2004) claims that, apart from (1) personality traits and (2) a skill of sharing knowledge, experience and practical activities, also (3) discipline skills influence the image of teachers to a large extent. Therefore, according to future teachers, a good teacher should be characterised by two components, i.e. personality and specialist knowledge. As for personality, subjects pointed to empathy and care as the most desirable features (Arnon & Reichel, 2007). Students' expectations regarding good teachers are conditioned by cultural and ethnic factors (Reichel & Arnon, 2009). It shows that the shaping of a positive image of a teacher depends on many variables.

As far as performing social roles is concerned, both the external and internal images are of considerable importance. High self-esteem helps to make use of your own potential more effectively. It increases your trust and faith in your skills and abilities and it contributes to changes in behaviour patterns resulting from other people's opinions. Conversely, low self-esteem is conducive to limiting activity and expansiveness and it also leads to avoiding challenging tasks (Owens, 1993).

The image of a professional group currently constitutes an interesting research area owing to implications it may have in the process of creating attitudes towards physical activity as well as forming mutual relations between different groups in school community.

The aim of the research was to get to know the image of PE teachers as seen by themselves and to compare it with how it is perceived by school community (students and teachers of other subjects).

### **Material and methods**

The research included 22 PE teachers and 126 teachers of other subjects as well as 171 final-year students from 5 upper-secondary schools from different towns of Lubelskie province. Three same-size groups were selected for the study. In total, the comparative analysis included 66 people from the following groups:

- GROUP I – 22 physical education teachers from upper-secondary schools – 9 women and 13 men aged 26-55 ( $M=39.50$ ,  $SD=8.21$ ) who had between 3 and 30 years of working experience ( $M=14.86$ ,  $SD=8.11$ );
- GROUP II – the group was created by purposive sampling (pair sampling taking into account such variables as age, gender and working experience). From among 126 teachers of subjects other than physical education, 22 respondents were selected, i.e. 9 women and 13 men aged 30-54 ( $M=40.09$ ,  $SD=7.76$ ) with working experience between 5 and 29 years ( $M=14.95$ ,  $SD=8.14$ ). No significant differences between group I and group II regarding age ( $U=233.50$ ,  $p=0.84$ ) and working experience ( $U=240.00$ ,  $p=0.96$ ) were observed.
- GROUP III – 22 participants aged 18-19 ( $M=18.36$ ,  $SD=0.49$ ) were selected (random-purposive sampling) from the group of 171 students. Population and gender of the respondents were controlled (9 women, 13 men).

All the participants were asked to complete the ACL-37 sheet (Adjective Check List) developed by G. Gough and A. B. Heilbrun. They were instructed to look at the list of 300 adjectives and tick the ones which best described PE teachers.

After controlling the accuracy of the completed sheets (No.Ckd value, i.e. the total number of adjectives checked, was higher than 19, the score on the communality scale Com was higher than 25, the value for each participant calculated from the  $2COM+MLS-Unfav$  formula [COM – communality scale; MLS – military leadership scale; Unfav – number of unfavourable adjectives] was above 20 points), calculating raw scores and qualifying each person for a particular group (taking gender into consideration), every single result was compared to Polish T-score norms (Martowska, 2012). The analysis was carried out on the basis of results obtained within 37 scales classified into five groups:

- modus operandi – No.Ckd – total number of adjectives checked, Fav – number of favourable adjectives checked, Unfav – number of unfavourable adjectives checked, Com – communality scale;
- need scales formed according to the theory of H. A. Murray – the need of Ach – achievement, Dom – dominance, End – endurance, Ord – order, Int – intraception, Nur – nurturance, Aff – affiliation, Het – heterosexuality, Exh – exhibition, Aut – autonomy, Agg – aggression, Cha – change, Suc – succorance, Aba – abasement, Def – deference;
- topical scales that take into consideration the aspect of interpersonal functioning: Crs – counselling readiness scale, Scn – self-control, Scf – self-confidence, Pad – personal adjustment, Iss – ideal self-scale, Cps – creative personality scale, Mls – military leadership scale, Mas – masculine attributes scale, Fem – feminine attributes scale;
- transactional analysis scales referring to the concept of E. Berne: CP – critical parent, NP. – nurturing parent, A – adult, FC – free child, AC – adapted child;
- scales of structural dimensions of personality referring to the concept of G. Welsh: A1 – high origence – low intellectence, A2 – high origence – high intellectence, A3 – low origence – low intellectence, A4 – low origence – high intellectence.

The above-mentioned presentation of scales and the method of data interpretation shown later on in this work were prepared on the basis of the available literature of the subject (Gough et al. 2012; Martowska, 2012).

## Results

At the first stage the results obtained by PE teachers were analysed (Table 1 – grey column). Their scores were related to respective T-score categories (0-29 – very low scores, 30-39 – low scores, 40-60 – average scores, 61-70 – high scores, 71-100 – very high scores) and then the obtained profile was interpreted. The vast majority of scores fell within average scores.

PE teachers describe themselves as being enterprising as well as ready and able to take the initiative, set even long-term goals and engage in hard work that would lead to achieving these goals. Task-oriented approach, diligence, conscientiousness, self-discipline, persistence, activity as well as strong will, ambition and readiness to take risks are undoubtedly connected with two traits that are worth copying, i.e. perseverance and efficiency. Cognitive skills (rationalism, quick thinking and reacting, perceptiveness, logicity, analyticity, wide interests) may turn out to be useful in this

process. PE teachers claim they are not competition-oriented. However, their great effort put into fulfilling a task as well as their willingness to meet the established criteria and socially accepted standards may lead to their being perceived by some as “programmed”, dominant, disrespectful of other people’s feelings and opinions or even ruthless (ready to use force) and condescending. A kind of interpersonal effectiveness, social ease, assertiveness, skilful group management particularly in the case of socially desirable activities and paying little attention to other people’s opinions are useful when trying to achieve goals. Self-confidence, especially in task situations, causes PE teachers to pay little attention to possible criticism. They do not analyse their own behaviour as well as that of others thoroughly. They just accept it. However, they demonstrate the need of affiliation. Yet in many cases the need to be liked is connected with their concern for maintaining social status. It does not mean, though, that teachers are not gentle. They like people and they enjoy working with them and helping them. PE teachers respect socially accepted rules and cultivate established norms and values. They can control their own needs in order to attain a goal and they do not tolerate any disruptions regarding their activities. Therefore, it may be stated that their activities, productivity and reliability are, in a sense, accompanied by their resignation from individuality (in an emotional dimension as well) and it is necessary for them to suppress their own emotions. They appreciate autonomy and moderation and refrain from being over-expressive. Such control does not always have to be an indication of composure. Social roles they assume seem to be limited to the main course of action they are engaged in. PE teachers are success - and goal-oriented and at the same time they try to prove themselves and earn a particular reward. It gives them a feeling of security. Also, they have a positive attitude to life and appear to be well-adjusted and satisfied with life.

The next analysis stage consisted of comparing the scores of PE teachers with other groups, i.e. with teachers of other subjects and with students separately. Due to a low number of subjects in the compared groups, the analyses were made with the use of non-parametric U Mann-Whitney test. These results are shown in table 1. Significant values of U Mann-Whitney test are marked in dark grey (according to the formula of comparisons: Group I-Group III and Group II-Group I).

**Table 1**

Analysis of scores in particular scales (ACL-37 measurement) and differences between groups

	GROUP II <i>teachers of other subjects</i>		GROUP I <i>PE teachers</i>		GROUP III <i>students</i>	
	RS*	CS*	RS*	CS*	RS*	CS*
	M;SD	M;SD	M;SD	M;SD	M;SD	M;SD
No.Ckd	30.59;14.36	34.18;3.82	39.73;24.86	36.73;6.80	42.72;23.98	37.50;6.56
Fav	15.95;9.71	48.45;10.22	25.04;14.12	58.50;10.09	22.59;14.59	49.04;11.34
	----- $U=121.00; p\leq 0.01$					
	$U=123.50; p\leq 0.01$ -----					
Unfav	1.95;2.80	45.77;10.73	0.45;0.86	39.73;2.29	1.95;2.80	45.77;10.73
	----- $U=133.50; p\leq 0.01$					
	$U=148.00; p\leq 0.05$ -----					
Com	2.86;2.98	47.63;10.78	6.00;3.65	56.45;9.27	2.86;2.98	47.64;10.78
	----- $U=144.00; p\leq 0.05$					
	$U=111.00; p\leq 0.01$					
Ach	5.41;3.84	57.14;13.54	7.77;4.15	63.09;9.91	5.41;3.84	57.14;13.54
Dom	4.54;2.44	60.09;7.14	5.45;3.22	61.64;6.56	4.86;3.28	58.50;7.12
End	3.82;4.81	51.45;13.34	7.14;4.11	58.95;4.91	5.36;4.82	51.86;8.40
	----- $U=128.00; p\leq 0.01$					
Ord	2.45;3.53	50.77;12.07	5.59;3.55	60.00;5.14	4.18;3.87	52.95;7.65
	----- $U=118.50; p\leq 0.01$					
	$U=125.00; p\leq 0.01$ -----					
Int	2.64;3.95	43.04;11.46	7.04;4.35	58.59;6.67	5.86;5.33	50.27;13.82
	----- $U=146.50; p\leq 0.05$					
	$U=63.00; p\leq 0.01$ -----					
Nur	2.54;3.68	43.77;9.67	5.63;4.75	50.18;7.79	3.95;5.02	43.73;10.48
	----- $U=155.50; p\leq 0.05$					
	$U=155.00; p\leq 0.05$ -----					
Aff	8.14;4.81	51.68;12.41	10.04;6.46	51.91;10.20	9.95;5.58	49.23;11.50
Het	2.45;2.81	46.73;10.34	2.41;2.70	44.32;6.22	2.77;2.74	44.59;6.96
Exh	3.00;2.31	55.54;6.22	2.32;2.46	52.95;6.24	3.23;2.22	54.32;4.54
Aut	1.23;2.39	49.82;9.98	0.59;2.03	46.14;9.47	1.82;2.36	51.86;9.52
Agg	-0.50;2.72	55.14;6.65	-2.18;2.08	51.18;5.46	-0.68;2.83	55.04;7.32
	----- $U=143.00; p\leq 0.05$ -----					
Cha	1.64;2.10	52.64;11.23	1.54;1.87	51.09;9.81	0.77;1.38	46.59;5.55
Suc	-0.09;1.31	45.91;7.08	0.09;1.60	48.63;8.31	-0.73;1.72	45.18;8.64
Aba	-1.36;1.53	42.59;5.63	-0.68;1.36	45.32;6.02	-1.50;1.82	43.09;4.96
Def	-0.09;1.82	46.91;5.17	0.63;1.79	48.82;6.28	0.32;2.01	47.59;6.47

**Table 1 (continued)**

Analysis of scores in particular scales (ACL-37 measurement) and differences between groups

<i>Crs</i>	-4.00;5.13	45.01;12.09	-3.36;4.83	48.09;8.04	-3.59;5.87	40.00;10.37
<i>Scn</i>	-0.45;2.15	48.23;7.16	0.73;1.93	51.82;6.24	0.09;1.69	50.18;5.74
<i>Scf</i>	6.23;3.74	60.68;11.07	7.14;4.39	61.04;9.38	6.86;4.40	57.95;8.70
<i>Pad</i>	3.59;2.99	53.41;10.95	5.36;2.77	58.73;7.21	4.63;3.57	53.14;11.51
<i>Iss</i>	4.91;4.14	59.77;11.56	7.14;4.58	64.86;11.20	5.82;5.08	57.77;9.82
-----			<i>U=151.50; p&lt;0.05</i>			
<i>Cps</i>	2.27;2.33	59.64;8.91	2.82;2.74	60.77;13.17	2.14;2.45	55.77;8.27
<i>Mls</i>	3.32;3.89	51.54;10.26	6.91;3.86	61.91;8.40	6.14;4.70	55.27;9.66
-----			<i>U=146.50; p&lt;0.05</i>			
-----			<i>U=108.50; p&lt;0.01</i>			
<i>Mas</i>	3.41;2.04	52.09;9.59	4.36;3.55	54.14;12.55	5.27;3.41	55.54;8.81
<i>Fem</i>	2.68;2.25	42.09;12.73	4.32;3.27	49.00;11.58	3.73;2.66	42.77;7.89
<i>Cp</i>	2.32;1.61	49.86;5.79	2.41;2.30	49.09;8.18	2.63;3.29	47.59;7.96
<i>Np</i>	3.45;3.58	48.18;8.52	7.14;4.37	56.18;5.97	5.82;4.77	50.95;8.95
-----			<i>U=104.50; p&lt;0.01</i>			
<i>A</i>	2.50;3.74	49.73;9.37	5.77;4.41	57.41;6.18	4.68;4.52	53.09;8.15
-----			<i>U=140.00; p&lt;0.01</i>			
<i>Fc</i>	3.44;3.10	57.77;8.35	2.68;2.77	54.32;6.78	2.73;2.62	53.09;8.15
<i>Ac</i>	-3.36;3.47	44.27;12.19	-6.41;4.28	36.45;8.44	-5.64;4.49	41.32;11.33
-----			<i>U=146.50; p&lt;0.05</i>			
<i>A1</i>	1.50;1.44	46.14;10.78	1.18;1.40	41.95;7.59	1.68;1.81	43.54;9.07
<i>A2</i>	1.82;1.40	45.95;7.31	1.95;1.89	44.27;7.67	2.32;1.91	46.18;8.83
<i>A3</i>	3.95;2.55	51.27;9.32	4.91;2.96	52.50;8.40	4.95;3.00	50.32;10.26
<i>A4</i>	3.45;2.77	51.09;9.16	6.13;3.48	60.68;8.90	5.00;3.48	52.73;9.91
-----			<i>U=131.50; p&lt;0.01</i>			
-----			<i>U=110.00; p&lt;0.01</i>			

\* RS – raw scores; CS – calculated scores

Note: the key to other abbreviations and the description of ACL-37 scales can be found in the section referring to the methodology of the authors' own research

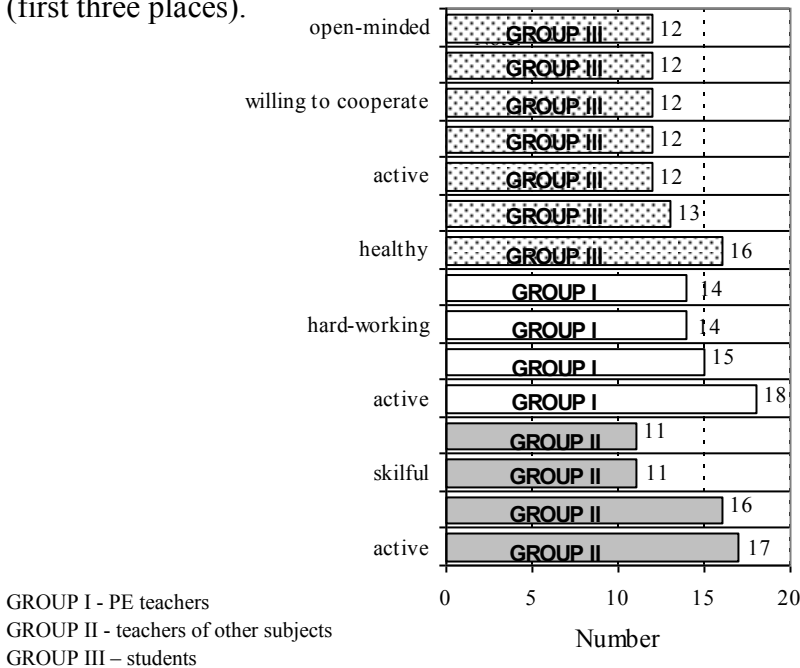
The findings revealed a number of significant differences between how PE teachers perceive themselves and how they are seen by their students and colleagues (teachers of other subjects).

Both groups (teachers of other subjects and students) claimed that PE teachers (compared to how they see themselves) are slightly less adjusted; they are impulsive, uncertain about their future, demonstrating an ambivalent attitude towards others and defensive patterns of behaviour (e.g. they express disagreement in a way different from the norm – by arguing or being acquiescent). They are less intellectual with fewer general interests. They are less interested in another person. In their opinion, PE teachers are less likely to analyse both their own and other people's behaviours and

feelings. They even avoid close relationships and are distrustful. Both groups noted that PE teachers are less responsible, restrained and patient. They are not so hard-working and they are willing to earn money more quickly. According to their students, PE teachers are less conscientious and less capable of achieving their goals. In turn, teachers of other subjects noticed that PE teachers are less satisfied with their current situation and have more difficulty dealing with stress and obstacles. They are less effective, which is connected with work requirements as well as their immaturity regarding the roles they have taken on.

When describing themselves, PE teachers marked significantly more adjectives that are favourable and fewer unfavourable adjectives than teachers of other subjects and students. Intragroup comparison revealed no significant differences between ranks, i.e. between the number of favourable and unfavourable adjectives marked in both comparative groups. PE teachers, though, marked more adjectives that are favourable than unfavourable ones ( $Z=-4.11, p \leq 0.01$  - Wilcoxon signed-rank test).

The last stage of presenting the results of the authors' own research included the analysis of how often particular adjectives were selected. Figure 2 illustrates adjectives most frequently chosen by each of the groups (first three places).



**Figure 2.** The most frequently selected adjectives describing PE teachers



It is worth noting that two adjectives are most frequently associated with the image of PE teachers (in all groups), i.e. active and energetic. These and all the other ones presented in figure 2 have a positive meaning.

## **Discussion**

After the analysis of the findings, it was observed that PE teachers are perceived by school community in a positive way. They see themselves better than they are seen by teachers of other subjects and students. As far as their own personality profile is concerned, efficiency is clearly distinguishable. The presence of this variable in a psychological profile is highly desired due to professional challenges (Gencay, 2009). This positive self-image may stem from their knowledge of what a PE teacher should really be like and/or from their own image of ideal 'me', i.e. how they would like to be perceived. The traits they marked as well as adjectives they indicated most frequently (active and energetic) may, in a sense, point to an attitude that is consistent with challenges PE teachers face nowadays, e.g. regarding healthy lifestyle (Gold et al. 2012).

The image of a PE teacher as seen by comparative groups is relatively similar. Teachers of other subjects and students discern some shortcomings in terms of psychosocial competences of a PE teacher particularly in the field of developing and maintaining satisfactory relationships with other people. It seems to be an essential indication as, firstly, it provokes reflection on the image and, secondly, it points to the need to verify teachers' professional preparation and to monitor the quality of education taking into account a possibility to introduce preventive and intervention measures. The culture of professional development including development that takes into consideration both the issues of promotion and the spheres of personal skills ought to be specified (Jasper, 2006; MacPhail, 2011).

Moreover, the features that teachers of other subjects marked indicate that they are more aware of current educational problems and the situation of Polish teachers than students. However, according to the assumptions of the definition of stress, external factors are not always perceived as the ones which disorganise optimal functioning of an individual. What is important is the skills of interpreting potentially difficult situations and, in broader terms, psychological resources (Lazarus et al. 1987; Paulik, 2012). These, according to the respondents, seem to be insufficient. Thus, it may be understood as another suggestion that future PE teachers (current students of physical education) as well as professionally active PE teachers should improve their skills and abilities, especially the so-called soft skills. They act as a buffer against the effects of the burnout syndrome that teacher (PE

teachers as well) are likely to suffer from (Carraro et al. 2010; Ha et al. 2011). It is hard to state whether the features and patterns of behaviour observed by teachers of other subjects result from the lack of competences of PE teachers or whether they are the first symptoms of the first stage of their burnout. Perhaps responses marked by teachers of other subjects stem from their own doubts and difficulties associated with working in this profession. This idea is worth analysing in future studies.

It also appears that the findings may be treated as a recommendation for further research whose results might be used to produce more comprehensive systemic solutions in the field of professional education and development (including psycho-socio-pedagogical aspects) of PE teachers. The need to implement such solutions has already been recognised (Karhus, 2010; MacPhail, 2011; Makopoulou et al. 2011; Kloeppel et al. 2013).

## **Conclusions**

Physical education teachers see themselves as willing to take action and to undertake initiatives as well as to pursue their goals with determination. Such traits should not go unnoticed by school directors or head PE teachers. In order to make use of PE teachers' potential and enhance their image in the eyes of school community, their supervisors should engage them in school activities taking into consideration their skills and abilities. On the other hand, PE teachers' need of acceptance, suppressing emotions and assuming desirable social roles in specific areas may contribute to faster burnout (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011; Carraro et al. 2010) as well as cause coronary heart diseases (Denollet, 1998). Preventing these unfavourable consequences in this professional group requires introducing programmes that would help them to deal with stressful situations and equip them with problem-solving skills.

The findings revealed that some elements of PE teachers' image as perceived by teachers of other subjects and students may exert negative influence on relations between them. These variables include hyperactivity, too high ambitions as well as difficulties in adjusting to the role of a PE teacher. The differences observed in the study create the dualism of the image. It may cause misunderstandings and reduce work efficiency. Therefore, it is necessary to develop social competences in this group and to confront the real image with the one created by school community as well as to undertake activities aimed at creating an image that would meet expectations of the community.

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