

## PHYSICAL EDUCATION TEACHERS' OPINIONS ABOUT SUITABILITY AND FEASIBILITY OF THE NEW CORE CURRICULUM FOR SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN POLAND

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### ABSTRACT

Education reform was introduced in Poland in 2009. Its aim is to improve the quality of school education by adapting the learning and upbringing process to the individual abilities and needs of pupils and their educational aspirations.

An essential element of the reform is introducing the new core curriculum, which is a key document defining the aims and content of teaching, skills of pupils and educational role of the school. It describes the learning effects after the every stage of education and contains proposals for physical activity to be chosen by pupils.

The aim of the study was to identify the opinions of physical education teachers working in working in post-secondary schools about the usefulness and practicability of a new core curriculum. Lifetime sports section rated highest of the six sections on the content of teaching; this activity is related to the preparation of pupils for lifelong sports activity.

Teachers rated the lowest section of health education. The analysis showed statistically significant differences between usefulness and practicability of this section – usefulness was rated significantly higher than practicability. There were no relevant differences in opinions of surveyed women and men, which shows similar assessment of teaching content by men and women.

**Keywords:** school reform, curriculum, teachers' opinions

### INTRODUCTION

The concept of quality of school or the quality of education is used by almost all education workers. However, this term is often understood as different aspects of school activities. According to the parents, a quality school is a place where teachers educate well and the children are safe. According to media reports, a quality school is one that effectively prepares for examinations or is placed very high in the rankings (Burtny, Szczepanski 2008, Nowak, 2011). Despite various changes in the education system, teachers' environment expresses criticism on reforms carried out for 30 years in physical education at schools that brought not many changes (Staniszewski, 2007, Pośpiech, 2006, Czarnańska, 2004, Frolowicz, 2002, Bielski, 1996, 1999). These opinions express important signal that rise reflection on directions of changes in the education system and the need to determine the profile of well-educated student in physical education. Indeed physical education can create space for confrontation on various teaching approaches. The final effect of the teaching process as a fulfilment of social expectations largely depends on teachers, on effective implementation of the curriculum objectives (Delignieres, Garsault, 2004). In 2009 in Poland another school reform was introduced, its purpose is to improve the quality of school education through adjusting the process of education and upbringing to individual abilities and needs of students and to their educational aspirations. Crucial element of the reform is to implement the new core curriculum; it is the key document determining objectives and content of teaching, pupils' skills and educational tasks of the school. It contains specific requirements related to activities in the class-lesson system, which are included in specific thematic blocks. It describes teaching outcomes after every stage of education and it includes options for physical activity to be selected by pupils. The new core curriculum was implemented in the school year 2009/2010 in first grade classes of Primary and Lower Secondary Schools. Whereas, in upper secondary schools it was implemented in the school year 2012/2013. The main purpose of physical education at this stage is to prepare pupils/ students to be physically active throughout life and to teach them to protect and care of their health. An integral part of the core curriculum in physical education, also compulsory for all students, is the health module, implemented as a 30 hours course.

The purpose of the study was to identify opinions of physical education teachers working in upper secondary schools about the suitability and feasibility of elements included in the new core curriculum.

1. In the research study were raised following research questions:
2. How teachers assess the suitability and feasibility of contents included in the new core curriculum?
3. Which of the contents included in the six sections of the core curriculum are characterized by the highest level of accomplishment and feasibility, and which have the lowest level?
4. Do discrepancies occur in assessments on suitability and feasibility of the analysed contents?
5. Do respondents' gender and work experience differentiate opinions about the analysed document?

### METHODS

The research study was performed in Opolskie and Silesian Voivodeship. It involved a group of 120 physical education teachers, including 65 female and 55 male respondents. All teachers possessed master's degree. Diagnostic survey with questionnaire technique was used as the research method. Respondents' task was to assess contents of the core curriculum according to a scale of 1 to 5. For the analysis of results, arithmetic means were calculated and the following tests used: the Wilcoxon test, the Mann-Whitney U test, and the Kruskal-Wallis; significance was set at  $p < 0.05$ .

### RESULTS

Contents of the new core curriculum in upper secondary schools were divided into the following thematic blocks:

1. Diagnosis of physical fitness, activity and development
2. Health training
3. Lifelong approach to sports and leisure
4. Safe physical activity and personal hygiene
5. Sports
6. Health education

Among the six sections concerning teaching contents, the highest rating received the section on lifelong approach to sports and leisure; this activity relates to preparation of pupils/ students for their lifelong physical activity by using various sports skills and it is targeted on recreation. The highest rating pertained to the suitability and feasibility. Teachers gave the lowest rating to contents on health education that are crucial for shaping a healthy lifestyle of pupils/ students. Low note concerned the suitability of these contents and the feasibility. Analysing the presented results (Fig. 1.) it can be stated that a common feature of the performed assessment is the advantage of suitability over the feasibility. Analysis using the Wilcoxon test showed statistically significant differences in all of the six sections.

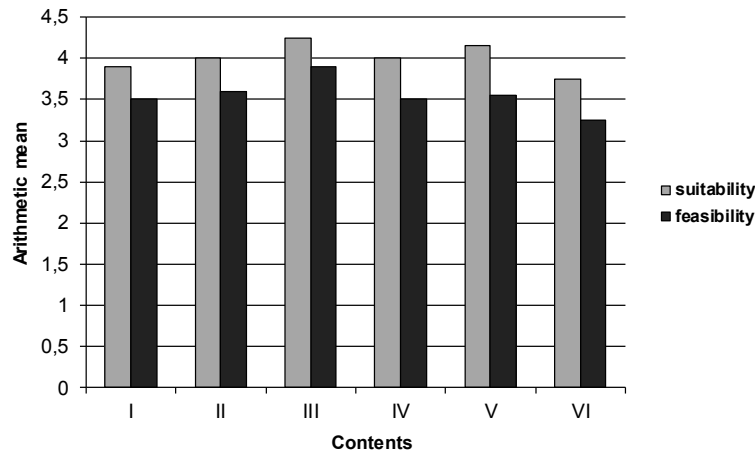


Figure 1

Suitability and feasibility of the new core curriculum in opinions of the surveyed teachers (total of females and males)

Afterwards, contents' suitability of the new core curriculum was analysed according to gender. Based on the given responses it can be stated that females ranked the contents with higher scale than males (Fig. 2). Out of the six sections, females rated with the highest score the fifth section on school sports, the aim of which is to participate in typical sports competition and to prepare for training in sports clubs. However, statistical analysis performed using the Mann-Witney U test showed no statistically significant differences in responses given by females and males.

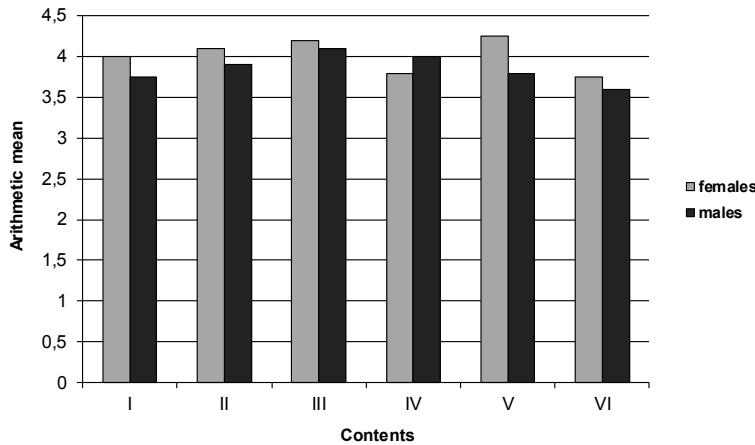


Figure 2

Suitability assessment of the new curriculum contents according to gender of the survived teachers

The feasibility study of contents also renders that females rather than males assessed with higher score, among all sections, the third one on lifelong approach to sports and leisure, which was considered as the most feasible for implementation in practice (Fig. 3). Analysis by using the Mann-Withney U test showed no statistically significant differences between the sexes.

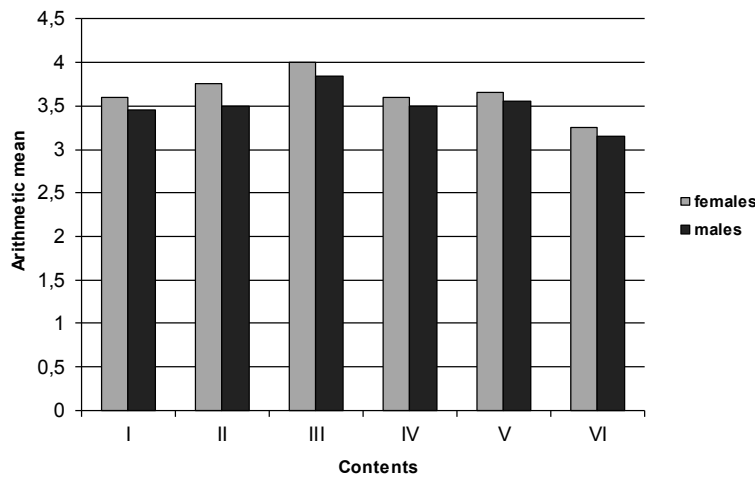


Figure 3

Overall assessment of the new curriculum content according to gander of the survived teachers

In further analyses, the work experience of respondents was considered. Splitting into groups was dictated by the time interval related with gaining the subsequent stages of professional promotion. Respondents were divided into three groups, to the first one were classified beginning teachers (interns and contract teachers - up to five years of work experience), the second group included nominated teachers (6-10 years of work), the third group consisted of certified teachers with the longest work experience (above 11 years of work). The obtained results indicate that teachers with medium and long term of work experience assessed the analysed document with highest grade, while beginning teachers with work experience of up to five years ranked the contents of the new core curriculum in physical education with the lowest score (Fig. 4). Despite the difference of arithmetic means in the three groups, analysis using the Kruskal-Wallis test showed no statistically significant differences in the assessments according to work experience.

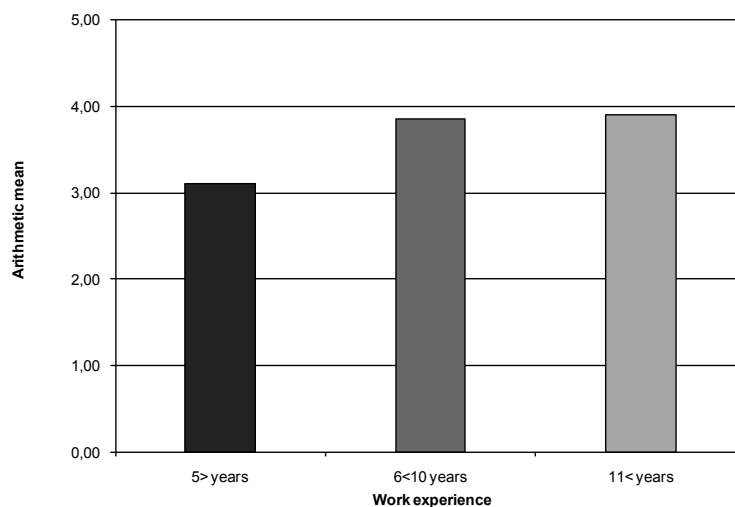


Figure 4

Overall assessment of the new curriculum content according to work experience

#### DISCUSSION

Research studies concerning the new core curriculum implemented in Poland are relevant according to, both, the theoretical and practical meaning. Responses obtained allow verifying the accuracy in selecting contents, which are being implemented in schools and can contribute to narrowing the discrepancies between scientific theory and school practice. Responses received from teachers confirm the fact that selection of contents is proper, according to the five-point scale; teachers assessed their suitability as high, giving a total mean score within the limits of 4.0. The lowest score for the contents was given to their feasibility, which is acknowledged by the fact that in the theoretical assumptions changes introduced as a result of the reform have been aptly introduced; however, their implementation can not be possible at the full form. There arise questions asking what caused the lower score for feasibility, can it be affected by the infrastructure of schools, teachers' competence level, or perhaps cognitive abilities of students. These questions will provide a starting point for further research.

#### CONCLUSION

1. The lifetime sports section was rated highest of the six sections on the content of teaching; this activity is related to the preparation of pupils for lifelong sports activity.
2. Teachers rated the lowest section of health education.
3. The analysis showed statistically significant differences between usefulness and practicability of this section – usefulness was rated significantly higher than practicability.
4. There were no relevant differences in opinions of the surveyed women and men showing similar assessment of teaching content by men and women.
5. Teachers having short-term work experience (less than 5 years), assessed the content of the new core curriculum on the lowest level.

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