

The Image of Physical Education Teachers and Their Class as Seen by Teachers of Other Disciplines

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ABSTRACT

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 attitudes towards them. How teachers and the discipline they teach are perceived is a significant factor that influences relations and atmosphere in the small school community. In the case of Physical Education (PE) teachers in Cypriot secondary schools, things might be different since they are dressed differently, they spend most of the time in the schoolyard or in the gym, they never carry books or homework, and so on. Various opinions are expressed, from time to time, about themselves and their class by teachers of other disciplines. These opinions vary from negative on one end to positive on the other. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to investigate the image of PE teachers and their classes in Cypriot secondary schools, as seen by teachers of other disciplines. For that purpose, 132 secondary school teachers (78 women and 54 men) of various disciplines were randomly selected to participate in this study. Teachers were recruited from secondary schools from all over Cyprus and were interviewed in their school settings during their free time. For the conduct of the interviews, a questionnaire was prepared with open-closed type questions, which consisted of 2 parts: The first part concerned the teacher, and the second concerned the physical education class. The duration of each interview was approximately 30 minutes. In the first part, teachers were asked about their relationships with the PE teacher, how they see him/her as a professional, how easy he/she is in his/her relationship with them, etc., while in the second part, they were asked about the importance of physical education, whether they believed that the class was as important as other disciplines in students' education and others. The data were analyzed using the method of continuous comparison and analytical induction and showed that three different views prevail about PE teachers and their class: 1) They are colleagues who have no difficulties in their work, are somewhat distant from other colleagues and their class does not have much to offer, 2) They are colleagues who easily develop good relationships with colleagues of other disciplines. However, their contribution to students' education through their class is not like that of other disciplines, and 3) They are well-intentioned colleagues, always available, easy to work with, who contribute significantly through their class like any other colleague, but with different duties, due to the nature of their class. Teachers of other disciplines are often influenced either by personal experiences of the past, forming a positive or negative image, or by individual cases in their school. Although PE teachers do not have anything to prove at school, since they have to be transferred to a different school every eight years, according to the Cypriot Education System and colleagues of other disciplines do not know them as professionals, many times they have to prove themselves in other colleagues' eyes through their work, in order to allow them to form positive perceptions of themselves as professionals and the contribution of their class to the overall student education.

Keywords: Image, physical education, physical education teachers, secondary school teachers.

Published Online: November 21, 2023

ISSN: 2736-5522

DOI: 10.24018/ejsport.2023.2.6.98

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I. INTRODUCTION

Image is the general impression that a person, organization, or product presents to the public. It conveys a purposefully formed profile of someone or something, containing some valuable characteristics developed to have an emotional and psychological impact on the target audience. The image of a given professional group is the way they are perceived by members of another group or people related to their profession,

which affects their relations, perceptions, and attitudes towards them. According to previous studies, the image of a good teacher consists of a variety of components such as knowledge of the subject matter, pedagogy (ability to break down subject matter and efficiently deliver it to students), organization (of students, material and class activities) and management skills, good relationships with students and other faculty, experience, personality characteristics, and other (Barone, 2004; Constantinides & Silverman, 2018; Dressel, 1987; Duviolier *et al.*, 2009; Miron, 1983).

Shepel (2009) supports that the image of any specialist, especially that of a teacher, must meet the requirements of the time and society. According to Shepel, three types of qualities contribute to the successful formation of a positive professional image: 1) The qualities that enable a teacher to please other people, 2) The qualities that characterize a person from the point of view of education, such as the ability not to create a conflict, the ability to resolve problems and to resist in stress, 3) The qualities determined by professional and life experiences and intuition of the individual.

The image of a professional group constitutes an interesting research area owing to the implications it may have in the process of creating attitudes towards physical activity as well as forming mutual relations between different groups in school communities. Particularly the case of Physical Education (PE) teachers, a professional group that was not investigated for its image.

In Cyprus, Physical Education teachers do not seem to have the best image among school teachers. Physical education in secondary schools is taught 1-3 times a week, according to the grade level of the students. According to the national school physical education curriculum, the aim of the class is the development and maintenance of positive attitudes toward Physical Education, the maintenance of an active lifestyle, the development of skills and knowledge, the promotion of health-related physical education, and other (Ministry of Education, Culture, and Sports, 2016: Secondary school curriculum).

Physical education in Cyprus does not require a final exam at the end of the school year or any examination such as fitness tests throughout the year. Students are expected to regularly participate in physical education and develop, according to the learning outcomes, as they are expected to do so in other classes, such as Math or Science. In addition, the class does not require any written assignments or homework, a factor that is always highlighted by teachers of other disciplines. No “homework” for the teachers allows for free time in the afternoon, which is usually translated as a non-demanding discipline. As mentioned before, at the end of the school year, there is no final exam in physical education, which translates to no correction time in the afternoon. In schools, however, teachers receive the same salary, no matter the discipline they are involved with. It seems reasonable then for teachers of other disciplines to support that physical education teachers do less, but they receive the same amount of money. However, is that the case?

II. METHODS

To examine the image of PE teachers and their class as seen by teachers of other disciplines in secondary Cypriot schools, 132 secondary teachers (78 female and 54 male) from different disciplines were randomly selected from public schools all over Cyprus to participate in this study (Table I). Teachers' years of experience varied between 5-28 years. Almost all of them carried experience from different schools around Cyprus, which was a benefit for the study since they have worked with a number of PE teachers. The purpose of the study was clearly explained, and questions were answered to make sure that all teachers were aware of what the investigator was doing. For the study, a questionnaire was prepared with open-ended questions, and interviews were scheduled with all participating teachers at their convenient time. The length of each interview was approximately 30 minutes. Teachers were asked about the significance of school physical education in children's education if they believed that physical education is a class equal to any other class in the school curriculum, their perception of the PE teacher as a professional, their relationship with the PE teacher, the relationship of the PE teacher with the students and other. Participating teachers were also asked if they exercise regularly, if they are playing or following sports, if they had positive or negative school experiences, and so on.

Since participating teachers came from different schools and different cities, a well-organized schedule was prepared to allow for 2- 4 interviews per day of visiting each city from a total of five cities. Teachers were encouraged to freely express their true feelings and were ensured that their names would not appear anywhere in the paper, in a future conference presentation, or elsewhere. Arrangements were made so the standard school program would not be affected by the investigator's visit. Therefore, interviews were scheduled according to participating teachers' non-teaching hours during regular school days upon receiving written and signed consent from the Ministry of Education, school principals, and participating teachers. The collected data were analyzed using the method of continuous comparison and analytical induction to develop a picture of the image of PE teachers and their class, as seen by teachers of other disciplines.

TABLE I: SECONDARY TEACHERS' BACKGROUND

Teacher	Gender	Years of experience	Middle/ High school years	Discipline	Teacher	Gender	Years of experience	Middle/ High school years	Discipline
T1	F	20	8m–12 h	Math	T67	F	12	8m–4h	Greek
T2	F	12	12m	English	T68	M	22	22m	Math
T3	M	16	12m–4h	Physics	T69	F	17	17m	Music
T4	F	14	14m	Greek	T70	F	9	9m	Religion
T5	M	18	18h	Math	T71	F	18	18m	Art
T6	M	13	13m	Music	T72	M	16	10m–6h	French
T7	M	15	11m – 2h	Math	T73	M	21	15m–6h	History
T8	F	16	16h	Greek	T74	F	25	11m–14h	Physics
T9	M	18	18m	Art	T75	F	19	5m– 4h	Greek
T10	F	16	10m – 6h	Comp.	T76	F	17	12m–5h	Comp.
T11	F	5	5m	Greek	T77	M	22	13m–9h	Math
T12	F	12	12m	Religion	T78	F	15	15m	House k.
T13	F	18	12m–6h	French	T79	M	23	8m–15h	English
T14	M	14	14m	English	T80	F	26	19m–7h	Greek
T15	F	19	8m–11m	Comp.	T81	M	13	13m	Religion
T16	M	17	17h	Greek	T82	F	16	16m	Arch.
T17	M	15	3m – 12h	Physics	T83	F	27	10m–17h	Math
T18	F	11	11m	Arch.	T84	F	15	12m–3h	History
T19	F	14	14m	House k.	T85	M	19	4m–15h	Physics
T20	M	10	10m	Technology	T86	M	17	17m	Art
T21	F	14	14m	History	T87	F	18	8m–12h	Comp.
T22	F	28	4m–24h	Greek	T88	M	14	14n	Technology
T23	F	17	17m	Greek	T89	F	21	13m–8h	Physics
T24	F	8	8m	Comp.	T90	F	27	12m–15h	Greek
T25	F	14	12m–2h	Math	T91	F	19	19m	French
T26	F	17	17m	History	T92	F	16	11m–5h	Math
T27	M	19	19m	Music	T93	F	17	17m	House k.
T28	M	16	14m–2h	Physics	T94	M	22	18m–4h	English
T29	F	11	11m	Religion	T95	M	19	7m–12h	History
T30	M	21	15m–6h	Greek	T96	F	14	14m	Greek
T31	M	18	4m–14h	Math	T97	F	18	18m	Religion
T32	F	13	13m	Arch.	T98	M	15	6m–9h	Comp.
T33	F	15	9m–6h	English	T99	M	7	7m	Technology
T34	F	18	18h	Physics	T100	F	10	7m–3h	Physics
T35	M	24	15m–9h	Greek	T101	F	12	12m	Math
T36	F	16	10m–6h	Math	T102	M	17	8m–9h	Math
T37	F	26	20m–6h	History	T103	F	16	16m	Music
T38	M	17	17m	Technology	T104	F	25	9m–16h	Greek
T39	M	14	9m–5h	Comp.	T105	F	20	13m–7h	English
T40	F	28	19m–9h	English	T106	F	9	9m	French
T41	F	15	15m	House k.	T107	M	18	18m	Religion
T42	F	23	20m–3h	History	T108	M	14	14m	Arch.
T43	M	12	12m	Religion	T109	F	18	14m–4h	Comp.
T44	M	22	14m–8h	Greek	T110	F	16	12m–4h	History
T45	F	18	11m–7h	Greek	T111	M	19	19n	Greek
T46	F	25	25m	Math	T112	F	11	11m	House k.
T47	F	13	13m	Music	T113	F	28	11m–17h	Math
T48	F	19	19h	Physics	T114	M	17	17m	Music
T49	M	16	16m	Arch.	T115	M	13	13m	Technology
T50	M	17	17m	Technology	T116	F	15	9m–6h	Physics
T51	M	13	13m	French	T117	F	17	11m–6h	French
T52	F	19	19m	Religion	T118	M	23	17m–6h	History
T53	F	25	21h–4m	Math	T119	F	16	16m	Arch.
T54	M	15	9h–6m	Math	T120	F	24	16m–8h	Greek
T55	M	17	4m–13h	English	T121	F	15	11m–4h	Comp.
T56	M	14	12m–2h	Greek	T122	M	19	15m–4h	English
T57	M	21	14m–7h	Comp.	T123	F	17	17m	Religion
T58	F	19	5h–14m	Physics	T124	F	14	14m	Math
T59	M	17	17m	Religion	T125	M	19	19m	Technology
T60	M	22	16m–6h	History	T126	F	22	17m–5h	French
T61	M	16	16m	Greek	T127	F	16	11m–5h	History
T62	F	18	18m	House k.	T128	M	12	10m–2h	Physics
T63	F	15	11m–4h	Arch.	T129	F	25	15m–10h	Greek
T64	M	24	19m–5h	English	T130	M	18	18m	Technology
T65	M	13	13m	Technology	T131	F	13	13m	House k.
T66	F	19	19m	Greek	T132	F	20	14m–6h	English

III. RESULTS

Analysis of the collected data from teachers' interviews revealed that the image of physical education teachers varies. Three different images were identified (see Table II for an overview).

TABLE II: IMAGES OF PE TEACHERS AS DESCRIBED BY OTHER DISCIPLINE TEACHERS AND PE VIEW

Image Type	Description
Image 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – PE teachers are colleagues who have no difficulties in their work and are somewhat distant from other colleagues. – Physical Education class does not have much to offer to students' education.
Image 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – PE teachers are colleagues who generally have good relationships with other teachers. – Physical Education class's contribution to students' education is unlike other disciplines.
Image 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – PE teachers always have good intentions to help, are always available, and are easy to work with, but they have different professional duties. – Significant contribution of Physical Education to students' education.

A. View 1 – The Rather Negative Image

Teachers of other disciplines stated that PE teachers are colleagues who have no difficulties in their work, are somewhat distant from other colleagues, and their class does not have much to offer. For example, Clair (pseudonyms are used throughout the paper), the Greek teacher, said that she carries students' homework, assignments, and other material almost every day, while PE teachers never carry anything. She commented: *"I could spend more time with my children if I didn't have to correct students' homework to provide them feedback."* John, a mathematics teacher, said that math is a kind of class and that the knowledge gained is beneficial since people use math every day and everywhere: *"You go the bank, you go to the grocers, anywhere you go, you have to do with math."* Similarly, Christina, a physics teacher, stated that she must prepare herself well to teach her class, while PE teachers just organize the students to play. Mary, an English teacher, wondered how difficult a PE teacher's job might be when the only thing he/she must do is have the students play sports.

Additionally, when comparing Physical Education to other classes, these teachers mentioned that parents rarely ask for their kids' progression and development in physical education. For example, Cynthia, a Physics teacher, stated:

"They do so in all other classes. Even parents understand that Physical Education is something else, not a real class. You can call it a recess class or a break from the classroom. Can you compare Physics to Physical education?" (Cynthia)

Similarly, John, a Chemistry teacher, responded: *"You can see a line of parents waiting to ask for their kids' progress, and at the same time, no one is interested in visiting the PE teacher."*

Other teachers mentioned that PE teachers kept some distance from them in terms of hanging out with them during the small school breaks. When they were told that PE teachers used that time to organize their upcoming class, the common comment expressed was: *"Come on! How much time does anybody need to put cones in a line and get the balls out of the closet?"* When they were asked if PE teachers would spend time with them if they did not have a class during a specific period, the answer was positive.

Interestingly, this category of teachers mentioned that PE teachers maintain a good relationship with their students. *"They see the PE teacher in the schoolyard during recess, and they gather around him to talk to him,"* Martha said. Paolo mentioned:

"You see several students asking questions about several things, like nutritional habits, way to exercise, how to maintain a normal body weight. They don't ask the Biology or the Housekeeping teacher, who may deal with similar topics. They listen to her, and many of them follow her advice. They even come back after a while to discuss the results!" (Paolo)

B. View 2 - The Rather Diplomatic Image

Non-PE teachers stated that PE teachers are colleagues who quickly develop good relationships with them. However, their contribution to students' education through their class is unlike other disciplines. In their statements, it was obvious that they would not give much credit to the class, although Physical Education is part of the school curriculum. Joanna, a Math teacher, stated: *"You can't compare Math or Greek to Physical Education! No way! You can tell what's important and not important in the material students learn."* Niko mentioned that what students do in Physical Education can be quickly learned in the afternoon when children play in the park with their friends. Similarly, Tania, a Computer teacher, went through a comparison of her class to a Physical Education class: *"Put computer learning on one hand and*

physical education on the other. Technology is everywhere today! Kids need to know how to use technology to make their lives easier. Nothing will happen if they don't exercise for a month or a year!"

This category of teachers, which represented 28% of the participant teachers in this study, mentioned in their interviews that PE teachers would develop good relationships with the rest of the faculty members of the school. They are gentle and kind, and no one would understand that they are PE teachers if they were not coming to school in different attire.

C. View 3 – The Rather Realistic Image

Teachers in this category, which surprisingly represented 51% of the participants, stated in their interviews that PE teachers are well-intentioned colleagues, always available, easy to work with, who contribute significantly to students' education through their class like any other colleague, but with different duties, due to the nature of their class. *"Whenever I needed help with a school celebration, the PE teachers in the schools I worked for were always there to support me,"* Caren, a Music teacher, stated. Similarly, Diana, a Greek teacher, said that she wouldn't be able to organize any school celebration without the PE teacher's help:

"He can do anything! He doesn't mind if he must stay longer in school. He's always willing and always available! I wonder why other teachers are not like that! ... When I need help to carry material to the House-keeping Room, she will organize the students to help me, but she will help too. I feel she's the person I can trust for assistance in school." (Cynthia)

Many of these teachers highlighted student injury incidents, either during class or in the schoolyard, when the first person to think about was the PE teacher. Christina described an incident in the schoolyard when she suddenly saw a female student lying down trembling like a fish:

"It was the first time I experienced such an incident. I wanted to help, but I was so terrified I didn't know what to do! I asked one of the students there to run and call the PE teacher. My colleague proceeded calmly, telling me not to worry and explaining that this was not the first incident with that student. The student experienced a seizure (epilepsy), but the PE teacher reassured me that everything would be OK. He put his jacket under the students' heads and asked everybody to stay away. A few minutes later, the patient student indeed recovered and started talking." (Christina)

Anna, an English teacher, shared her story:

"During class, one of my students suddenly fainted and fell off the chair. He wasn't moving, and his classmates were scared. I did not take First Aid training, so I didn't know what to do. One of the students suggested calling the PE teacher. I asked him to run and get him as soon as possible. In less than a minute, the teacher appeared and took care of the incident. Thank God the student was OK, but the PE teacher suggested that he be sent to the hospital and asked one of the school secretaries to inform his parents. I was so relieved that everything was OK. However, that was the reason I became a First Aider!" (Anna)

Allison said:

"PE teachers are well respected as people of the school community by their students. Especially when students see them taking care of an incident, such as an injury during Physical Education or any other incident in the school. In addition, when other colleagues are not trained as First Aiders, the first person to call is the PE teacher. Students seem to acknowledge this." (Allison)

Jason highlighted the information students receive from their PE teachers and how they see them: *"They are teenagers. They start taking care of their bodies to improve their image and to look better. They value the information they get for their nutrition and their exercise, so they similarly value their PE teachers."*

On the researcher's comment that students seem to feel comfortable talking to the PE teachers instead of other teachers, many teachers agreed. Extending the comment, the researcher mentioned that it seems at least weird that students find PE teachers interesting people to hang out with during recess, but the teachers don't. Caren replied: *"This is something else! We sometimes hang out during recess; however, we prefer to be with teachers of the same discipline to discuss issues for the class."*

On another researcher's comment that PE teachers never have to carry students' homework at home, teachers of other disciplines responded that:

"They do other things that we don't do, such as preparation of the school sports teams, the track and field teams, and the school celebrations for several events. They often travel with these teams away from

school or to other cities for the students' track and field games or to play against another school's team for the students' league. That's a great responsibility, isn't it?" (Teacher 3)

IV. DISCUSSION

A first attempt to develop a picture of the image of PE teachers and their class, as seen by teachers of other disciplines, was the purpose of this study. Physical Education teachers' image in Cyprus varies. Three different views were identified. According to the results, one out of five teachers (21% of the participants) of other disciplines carry a negative image for PE teachers. These teachers usually had a negative example of a PE teacher in their mind that they used to work with. When you refer to Physical Education, they have a different negative story to share; *"Let me tell you about this PE teacher..."* However, they used to generalize things and refer to all PE teachers. Some had four or five PE teachers in their school, but they used to refer to that PE teacher for whom they had a negative view. When asked if all PE teachers in their school were like that, the answer was negative. However, they would generalize their opinion, referring to PE teachers and not to the one PE teacher for whom they had a negative opinion.

It is worth noting that the majority in this category of teachers had either negative attitudes toward physical education or did not exercise regularly. Some believe that exercise has nothing to offer, even when a person's goal is to lose weight! For instance, Georgia, a Physics teacher, said that if someone wants to decrease body weight, he/she must go on a diet. He/she doesn't have to sweat all the time!

Attitude has a strong impact in different ways on people's lives. One of the ways attitude impacts peoples' lives is related to attitudes toward physical activity. Physical Education experiences offered in school influence attitude, which influences attitude toward physical activity and, subsequently, physical activity behavior (Carlson, 1995; Ennis, 1996; Portman, 1995; Robinson, 1990; Solmon & Lee, 1996). Therefore, these teachers had negative feelings about Physical Education and the person that the class was assigned to due to their negative experiences as school students.

According to The White House Task Force on Childhood Obesity: Report to the President, physical education is:

"... considered the cornerstone of a school-based comprehensive physical activity program....A quality PE program can increase student participation in physical activity, increase their physical fitness, and enhance their understanding about the purpose and methods of physical activity." (Let's Move, 2010, p. 70)

In addition, tons of research studies refer to the contribution of physical activity to maintaining a steady and healthy body weight (Elder & Roberts, 2008; Fortier *et al.*, 2002; Hastie *et al.*, 2009; Kahan, 2007). Therefore, this knowledge is not something new; instead, it's there for anyone to learn it and apply it accordingly.

Schools are expected to implement Physical Education programs to teach children how to live an active and healthy lifestyle. A quality Physical Education program emphasizing health-related goals and lifetime activities can give students the skills to be active as children and adults, providing both short-term and long-term health benefits (McKenzie, 2003). Since active children are more likely to become, active adults and overweight children are more likely to grow into overweight adults (Bar-Or *et al.*, 1998; Gam, 1985; Kolata, 1986; USDHHS, 1988), a positive experience in physical education classes has the potential to encourage children to be active as adults, decreasing the threatening prevalence of obesity (NASPE, 2004).

A second category of teachers shared a rather positive image of PE teachers, mentioning that they are colleagues who have good relationships with the rest of the faculty and spend time with them whenever they don't have a class. They are always gentle and kind to everybody, and they have stories to share about several incidents that occur in class. However, when referring to Physical Education as a class, they would *"build a wall,"* separating it from the rest of the classes in the school curriculum. There was a feeling among these teachers that Physical Education's contribution to students' education was not like that of other disciplines. In their eyes, all other classes seem to be more significant when compared to Physical Education. What they don't value is the contribution of Physical Education to the student's total development. When it was stressed to the teachers that regular physical activity might help children and adolescents build musculoskeletal solid and cardiorespiratory systems, control their body weight, reduce stress, reduce the risk of developing severe health problems such as heart disease and others, teachers would react saying *"it's true,"* however, they could not make the connection between school Physical Education and all these benefits.

Physical activity that students engage in during school Physical Education should be personally meaningful and satisfy students' movement needs. Students should be kept accountable and feel like active participants in the learning process. Through this active and meaningful engagement, students get prepared to participate in physical activity for a lifetime, fulfilling one of the most important goals of Physical

Education (Constantinides & Silverman, 2018). Unfortunately, during their interviews, these teachers stressed that they had never had the chance to experience that. In addition, each one had a negative experience to share, sometimes a humiliating experience in front of everybody, which made them develop negative attitudes towards Physical Education.

The final cluster of teachers' views seemed to be more realistic as far as the way they see PE teachers and their classes. These teachers did not make any distinction between PE teachers and others. Instead, they see them as colleagues who always have good intentions to help, are always available, and are easy to work with. They described occasions when PE teachers had helped them in school celebrations and school projects when they needed someone there. They mentioned situations when the school was involved with European projects under the Erasmus+ umbrella, when they needed support to organize activities for children and their teachers from different countries, to organize activities in school, and tour activities around the country for sightseeing. PE teachers were always there. As Ariana said: "*These are the type of colleagues you want to work with. To be able to support you whenever needed, to be able to exchange ideas and collaborate with.*"

Teachers in this category understand that PE teachers are colleagues with different types of duties due to the nature of their class. Since their class involves more "*physical*," obviously, the lesson cannot be conducted in a classroom full of tables and chairs but in a space area, such as the gym or the schoolyard. Nevertheless, they have to prepare themselves in a similar way to teachers of other disciplines do. They care about the students and enjoy great respect from them.

In this study, one out of two teachers of other disciplines do not give much credit to Physical Education as an equal class with other classes in the school curriculum. In addition, their view is aligned with what Whipp *et al.* (2007) suggested, that PE teachers sense the lack of "*genuine*" opportunities to participate in educational debate and decision-making. Furthermore, limited professional respect is shown by administrators and parents in several ways, making them feel like lower-category teachers!

Although Physical Education is included in the school curriculum, it seems that all teachers of other disciplines do not recognize its contribution to students' education and health. In one out of two teachers, Physical Education looks like recess or just time for the students to play and relax from class. Other classes weigh more on the scale when compared to Physical education. In addition, for some of them, PE teachers seem lonely in school. However, PE teachers continue to strive for the best of their students, according to the encouraging 51% of teachers of other disciplines. Hopefully, when teachers of other disciplines realize the significance of Physical Education and physical activity in students' lives, their opinion of Physical Education will probably improve.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that they do not have any conflict of interest.

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