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# The personality and competences of primary-school teachers: A research study

## Osobowość i kompetencje nauczycieli szkół podstawowych — badania naukowe

### Abstract

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This article presents an investigation into how primary-school pupils imagine a good teacher and what characteristics of teachers they appreciate. The teacher's personality is a quality of central importance to the teaching process. Teachers find themselves in many diverse situations and they cannot always remain the same. Each situation requires different qualities, attitudes and knowledge. In different situations, the teacher can achieve the same educational outcome in various ways, by using a range of methods. No teacher can be expected to have the ideal personality and cannot possibly have all the desired qualities, so some qualities compensate for the lack of others. However, the crucial aspects of a good teacher's personality is authenticity, naturalness and positive relationship with pupils.

### Key words

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primary education, teacher's competences, typology of teachers

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## Abstrakt

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W artykule przedstawiono wyniki badań, w jaki sposób uczniowie szkół podstawowych wyobrażają sobie dobrego nauczyciela i jakie cechy nauczycieli są przez nich doceniane. W procesie nauczania osobowość nauczyciela jest cechą o kluczowym znaczeniu. Sytuacje edukacyjne wymagają zróżnicowanych cech, postaw i wiedzy nauczycieli. Nie można oczekiwać, że każdy nauczyciel będzie miał idealną osobowość i zestaw cech pożądaných przez uczniów. Niektóre cechy rekompensują brak innych. Kluczowe aspekty osobowości nauczyciela to: autentyczność, naturalność i pozytywne relacje z uczniami.

## Słowa kluczowe

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edukacja podstawowa, kompetencje nauczycieli, typologia nauczycieli

The teacher's personality is a very important characteristic that affects the pupils' attitude towards school subjects and also influences the relationship the pupils have with a particular teacher.<sup>1</sup> Vališová<sup>2</sup> talks about the necessity of building trust, which highlights the importance of natural authority. A successful teacher may not simply be always nice and good. The pupils themselves define a successful teacher as one who must be strict but kind and whose lessons are interesting.<sup>3</sup>

The teacher should have a natural authority to be able to maintain order in the classroom, but also to be able to pass on his knowledge and experience in an appropriate way to the pupils. Successful teachers often become role models for their pupils, which means that their attitudes and opinions can influence pupils very positively or negatively. The teacher must behave humanely and professionally.<sup>4</sup>

According to Hanuliakova,<sup>5</sup> a good teacher is one who tries to respect every single pupil during the lesson, has an innovative approach to teaching, engages pupils' creativity in the learning process and tries to choose the best teaching strategy that appeals to the pupils. The teacher in this case becomes a positive model for the pupils.

In short, there are numerous assumptions about teachers' personality traits which are beneficial. The topic is much discussed in motivational literature, but little concrete research has been carried out which could back up these assertions. Some of the research that does exist is very limited in scope. This article presents the trial and piloting of a new tool for the assessment of the development of teachers and their

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<sup>1</sup> N. Sillamy, *Psychologický slovník*, Univerzita Palackého, Olomouc, 2001, p. 8.

<sup>2</sup> A. Vališová, *Jak získat, udržet a neztrácet autoritu*, Grada Publishing, Praha, 2008, p. 144.

<sup>3</sup> J. Průcha, *Učitel: současné poznatky o profesi*, Portál, Praha, 2002, p. 28.

<sup>4</sup> V. Holečka, *Psychologie v učitel'ské praxi*, Grada, Praha, 2014, p. 34.

<sup>5</sup> J. Hanuliaková, *Kreovanie klímy triedy v edukačnej praxi*, IRIS, Bratislava, 2010, p. 15.

leadership roles, which has given us a much more refined first glimpse of what makes teachers special.<sup>6</sup>

The teaching and learning process is closely linked with the personalities of the teachers including not only teaching methods and learning techniques, but it is also relation between the temperament and social competences of the teachers, so teachers are determined by their roles.<sup>7</sup>

The teacher's personality is the most important aspect in the educational process,<sup>8</sup> and many researchers consider the Five-Factor Model of personality to be the leading approach.<sup>9</sup>

Typology of the teachers is the object of the research studies focused relation between the personality characteristics and their effects on learning process of students in the framework of educational psychology, pedagogy, anthropology and so on.<sup>10</sup>

Some publications regarding teachers' professional behaviour argue that it is unrealistic to expect that a generally desirable profile of teachers' professional behaviour, appropriate in all educational situations, can be established. Research involves cataloguing the behaviours of efficient teachers and subsequently anticipating students' achievements (teacher-student interaction studies).<sup>11</sup>

There are different types of teachers and there are different ways what they consider to be important in their teaching process, it can be divided into three domains:<sup>12</sup> a) the domain of subject matter knowledge and skills; b) domain of pedagogical knowledge and the skills regarding the planning, land evaluation (pedagogical experts) and c) the domain of students' social, emotional and moral development during learning process.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> L. Göncz, *Teacher personality: a review of psychological research and guidelines for a more comprehensive theory in educational psychology*, "Open Review of Educational Research" 2017, vol. 4, iss. 1, pp. 75-95.

<sup>7</sup> V. Rosić, *Deontologija učitelja – temelj pedagoške etike*, "Informatologia" 2011, vol. 44, iss. 2, pp. 142-149.

<sup>8</sup> W. L. Sanders, J. C. Rivers, *Cumulative and residual effects of teachers on future student academic achievement*, University of Tennessee Value-Added Research and Assessment Center, Knoxville 1996, p. 14.

<sup>9</sup> A. Göncz, L. Göncz, J. Pekić, *The influence of students' personality traits on their perception of a good teacher within the five-factor model of personality*, "Acta Polytechnica Hungarica" 2014, iss. 11, pp. 65-86.

<sup>10</sup> L. Göncz, *Teacher personality...*, pp. 75-95.

<sup>11</sup> Ibidem, p. 91.

<sup>12</sup> Ibidem, pp. 75-95.

<sup>13</sup> D. Beijaard, N. Verloop, J. D. Vermunt, *Teachers' perceptions of professional identity: An exploratory study from a personal knowledge perspective*, "Teaching and Teacher Education" 2000, vol. 16, pp. 749-764.

The professional skills-development of the teachers has to be supported within the long-life learning to improve teaching results and outcomes of learning process that is influenced by many factors linked with the personality of the human being and aspect of the social investment theory.<sup>14</sup>

According to this theory, if the teacher is older, he is less likely to implement new and innovative methods in learning process and as well as less extraverted as they age,<sup>15</sup> and, during different periods of their professional careers the emotional stability has been changed.<sup>16</sup>

Li and Wu<sup>17</sup> study found no differences between good and poor teachers using four dimensions of Eysenck's personality model,<sup>18</sup> that include psychoticism, extraversion, neuroticism and social conformity. Trying to explain the results,<sup>19</sup> there is the possibility that 'when college students evaluated teaching, they paid more attention to the teaching quality than to the teacher personality'.<sup>20</sup>

However, Petrović-Bjekić<sup>21</sup> refers to Birkinshaw's studies (which relied on the same theory) and demonstrated that extraverted and more emotionally stable teachers are more efficient in many aspects of their work.<sup>22</sup> For 'typical' teachers, there was a predominance of 'ESFJ' types (Extraversion, Sensing, Feeling and Judging).<sup>23</sup>

Our research is focused on primary school pupils' preferences concerning the personalities and competences of teachers, with respect to the five dimensions concerning the teaching and learning process as presented by Kyriacu.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> S. Srivastava, *The five-factor model describes the structure of social perceptions*, "Psychological Inquiry" 2010, vol. 21, pp. 69–75.

<sup>15</sup> A. Caspi, B. W. Roberts, *Personality development across the life course: The argument for change and continuity*, "Psychological Inquiry" 2001, vol. 12, pp. 49–66.

<sup>16</sup> N. W. Hudson, B. W. Roberts, J. Lodi-Smith, *Personality trait development and social investment in work*, "Journal of Research in Personality" 2012, vol. 46, pp. 334–344.

<sup>17</sup> H. Q. Li, Y. Z. Wu, *Comparative study on the personality patterns of 'good teacher' and 'bad teacher' as perceived by college students*, "Advanced Materials Research" 2011, vol. 271–273, pp. 760–76.

<sup>18</sup> H. J. Eysenck, *The structure of human personality*, 3rd ed., Methuen, London 1970.

<sup>19</sup> L. Göncz, *Teacher personality...*, op. cit., pp. 75–95.

<sup>20</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>21</sup> D. Petrović-Bjekić, *Teachers' dynamic personality characteristics and teaching effectiveness*, "Psihologija", 1997, vol. 30, pp. 93–110.

<sup>22</sup> Ibidem, s. 22

<sup>23</sup> L. Göncz, *Teacher personality...*, op. cit., pp. 75–95.

<sup>24</sup> Ch. Kyriacu, *Klíčové dovednosti učitele: cesty k lepšímu vyučování*, Portál, Praha 2012.

## Methodology and participants

This study was designed to explore the ideas of primary school pupils about the positive and negative characteristics of teachers. The aim was to find out what competences the teachers have in terms of the 5 dimensions created by Kyriacou<sup>25</sup> and how these competences are perceived by the pupils. Data collection was done using a teacher competence questionnaire that contained the following 6 dimensions: Planning and Preparation, Implementation of the Lesson, Management of the Lesson, Classroom Climate, Discipline, Pupil Benefit Assessment/Evaluation.

The research sample consisted of 274 pupils attending the 7th, 8th and 9th grades of a primary schools located in Malacky, which represents 66.34% of respondents from the total group. In total, 258 questionnaires were accepted; 30.2% of respondents attended 7th grade, 32.6% attended 8th grade, and 37.2% were in 9th grade. The gender of the participants was as follows: 46.5% of the respondents were boys and 53.5% were girls.

### Hypotheses:

H1: Pupils' ideas about ideal teachers will be different based on gender.

H2: Pupils will prefer a different teachers' typology in the learning process.

H3: In terms of gender, pupils will prefer different characteristics when assessing a teacher.

## Results and discussion

Chi-square statistical testing reveals differences in teacher assessment between boys and girls with respect to the six dimensions, as shown in Table 1. This confirms that boys and girls do indeed different ideas about the ideal teacher ( $p < 0.05$ ,  $df = 2$ ,  $r = 0.025-0.110$ ). H1 can thus be accepted.

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<sup>25</sup> Ibidem.

**Table 1.** Dimensions of teacher's competences

Teacher's competence	df	r	p
Preparation of the lesson			
Preparation for the lesson and good manners	2	0.060	0.020
Good learning and teaching management	2	0.048	0.017
Managing the lesson			
Learning outcomes and education process	2	0.114	0.014
Using learning methods and class cooperation	2	0.119	0.057
Climate in class			
Making rules in class and ethical standards	2	-0.31	0.043
Building trust and pleasant atmosphere	2	0.003	0.035
Discipline			
Ability to have natural respect	2	-0.94	0.026
Mutual respect in class	2	-0.020	0.199
Evaluation			
Pupils often criticize teachers	2	0.131	0.045
Teacher can accept criticism from pupils	2	0.116	0.028

Being a positive model for pupils is often an underestimated issue; on the other hand, it is up to the individual appreciation of the pupil who chooses the pattern in the context of social learning, first and foremost of mutual respect.<sup>26</sup> To be successful in the teaching process, it is necessary that the teacher develops psychological and pedagogical knowledge.<sup>27</sup>

**Table 2.** Characteristics of ideal teacher

What qualities should an ideal teacher have?	Percent	N	Girls	Boys	P
To understand, to actively listen	32.2	83	48	35	0.591
Be fair, objective	24.8	64	36	28	<b>0.044</b>
Be respected and have natural authority	19.0	49	30	19	<b>0.014</b>
Be communicative, open-minded	29.0	75	38	36	0.743
Be empathetic, reliable, inspiring confidence	24.0	62	34	28	0.041
Be kind-hearted, humane, kind	30.1	77	37	44	0.259

<sup>26</sup> R. Dyrťová, *Začínající učitel*, Tribun, Brno 2008, p. 90.

<sup>27</sup> O. Mikšík, *Psychologická charakteristika osobnosti*, Karolinum, Praha 2007, p. 41.

What qualities should an ideal teacher have?	Percent	N	Girls	Boys	<i>P</i>
Encourage, motivate and support pupils	25.6	66	36	30	0.462
Be a mediator and solve conflicts, knowing how to cope and solve a problem	15.9	41	24	17	0.650
Be a good technical and practical teacher	27.6	73	42	31	<b>0.039</b>
Use new, innovative ways of teaching, avoid teaching in the same way	31.0	81	43	37	0.573
Have a sense of humour, be funny, relaxed	39.9	103	40	63	<b>0.012</b>

The teacher should establish a classroom discipline, relying on rules and authority that most classes accept. Classroom discipline and order provides a better teaching environment, and the teacher also shows pupils the necessity to accept certain rules that they will meet later in society and in real life.<sup>28</sup>

The difference in the evaluation of positive qualities between boys and girls occurred with respect to the following properties: fairness, objectivity ( $p = 0.044$ ), respect and authority ( $p = 0.014$ ), empathy ( $p = 0.041$ ), conflict solving ( $p = 0.050$ ), sense of humour ( $p = 0.012$ ).

The teacher must be prepared to deal with various conflict situations that may arise at school. He often has to anticipate and be interested in what is happening and how pupils feel that day at school. Features such as objectivity and justice are important. The teacher should support his pupils in order to create a pleasant environment, in which the relations among the pupils themselves are improved, not only between the pupils and the teacher. This is related to the prosocial behaviour of the teacher, which includes empathy and assertiveness. The teacher should have a natural authority to guide his / her pupils to activity. He should also communicate with pupils, work together to create different rules of behaviour, and choose the best teaching methods to obtain specific learning outcomes, at the same time striving for self-development as well.

Hupková and Petlák<sup>29</sup> report yet another important feature in the teaching profession: a sense of humour. In general, optimism helps create an optimal climate and improves classroom relationships. A sense of humour that is acceptable and tactful has a positive effect on the whole

<sup>28</sup> J. Hanuliaková, *Kreovanie klímy triedy v edukačnej praxi*, IRIS, Bratislava 2010, p. 13.

<sup>29</sup> M. Hupková, E. Petlák, *Sebareflexia a kompetencie v práci učiteľa*, Vydavateľstvo IRIS, Bratislava 2004, p. 135.

educational process. Another important quality is the teacher's creativity, which is essential in the practice of this profession. Teachers rely on their creativity when planning courses and lessons. However, any given lesson may not go according to the teacher's idea, so it is essential to react flexibly and to approach various unexpected situations creatively.

The teacher can create a positive climate through his approach to pupils in a particular class. According to Koštrnová,<sup>30</sup> getting to know the students, being able to understand their needs, actively listen to their opinions and problems is more worth rather than only teach and train students. The teacher should be able to perceive the world from the pupil's perspective, respect him and show support. The family plays a great role in the process of socialisation and education, making children more skilled and prepared for the overcoming of obstacles in life. There is a lack of understanding and communication in most families, that's why it is important to provide it in the school environment.<sup>31</sup>

Research results have showed that pupils prefer teachers who encourage, motivate and understand them, like more the teacher who helps (31.4%) to the teacher who organizes and who can explain the subject matter (24.4%). Second, they would prefer a teacher who can understand them, who creates a good atmosphere in the classroom, is kind-hearted, and listens to the students (27.9%). Lastly, they appreciate those teachers who lead pupils to responsibility and can prepare them for life (16.3%).

**Table 3.** Preferred type of teacher

Typology	N	Percent
Teacher who organizes	63	24.4
Teacher who helps	81	31.4
Teacher who understands	72	27.9
Teacher who prepares for life	42	16.3
Total	258	100.0

Kohoutek and Ourada<sup>32</sup> point to the style of interaction as an essential characteristic of the teaching process, which determines how the teacher and the pupils interact. Classroom climate is one of the

<sup>30</sup> D. Koštrnová, *Tvorba a rozvoj pozitívnej klímy v triede*, Metodickopedagogické centrum, Bratislava 2014, p. 24.

<sup>31</sup> P. Tománek, *Ženy a muži v medzigeneračných turbulenciách 'v' a 'mimo' rodiny*, "Studia Scientifica Facultatis Paedagogicae" 2018, vol. 3, iss. 17, pp. 37-43.

<sup>32</sup> R. Kohoutek, K. Ourada, *Psychologie osobnostních typu učitele*, Akademické nakladatelství CERM, Brno 2000, p. 19.



fundamental characteristics that influence the teacher's behaviour and thus the students' performance. Dytrt<sup>33</sup> has conducted research to find out which style is the most preferred one. The most preference (46.2%) was given to the role of the teacher as the facilitator, the second to the role of the manager, and the third to the pragmatic role.

Another part of the questionnaire was focused on finding out which negative characteristics the pupils least appreciate in teachers. The respondents could mark five negative characteristics. The most common negative traits that pupils have reported were the teacher's tendency to shout or scream (47.7%). They said that teachers often convey changes in their mood (62.8%), while 32.8% of respondents claimed that the lack of ability on the part of the teacher to draw the pupils's attention to the lesson was a negative quality. A similar number of participants (32.9%) consider it to be a negative quality that the teacher is not interested in them, is not interested in how they feel, what they experience, and so on. Finally, 40.7% regarded it as a negative trait that the teacher teaches in the same way.

**Table 4.** Listed negative characteristics of the teacher

Negative characteristics of the teacher	N	Percent
The teacher is old-fashioned, doesn't keep up with the times	44	17.1
The teacher screams a lot	<b>123</b>	<b>47.7</b>
The teacher labels the pupils	68	26.4
The teacher is moody	<b>162</b>	<b>62.8</b>
The teacher is not objective in assessment	61	23.6
The teacher does not show interest in pupils, ignores pupils, does not listen	<b>85</b>	<b>32.9</b>
The teacher is very critical, strict and has high demands	62	24.0
The teacher cannot impose order on the classroom, which results in noise in the classroom; the teacher has no respect, lack of authority	80	31.0
The teacher teaches and explain the school subject issues in a repetitive way	<b>105</b>	<b>40.7</b>
The teacher often gives marks and homework	66	25.6
The teacher has unrealistic expectations	21	8.1
The teacher is not open minded or missing humourous approach	<b>82</b>	<b>32.4</b>

<sup>33</sup> R. Dytrtová, *Začínající učitel*, *Tribun*, Brno 2008, p. 90.

Children and young people are quite often exposed to shouting, not only at school, but also in their families, where mothers and fathers scream at them, trying to gain authority by using a raised voice and punishment.<sup>34</sup>

The results of the research have shown that, more than the ability to explain course content, pupils want their teacher to understand them and to listen to them, which was confirmed by 32.2% of the pupils in this study. The teacher characteristics which were the most valued by the participants were communicativeness (29.0%), kindness and warmth (30.1%), the ability to conduct lessons in an innovative way (31%) and a sense of humour (40.0%).

## Conclusion

Like in any other profession, motivation at work is crucial for the job of a teacher. At present, we can see, both in our country and abroad, a lack of interest on the part of young people in becoming a teacher. There are several reasons for this: relatively low pay, the low status of this profession in society, high requirements concerning performance, and, last but not least, the changing values and behaviour of children and young people with whom teachers are in daily contact. Additionally, potential teachers are further discouraged by the possibility of a hostile atmosphere in the work environment, either among teachers or in the classroom. According to Tománek and Mátejková,<sup>35</sup> a relationship based on trust and open-minded thinking is the key to achieve success in the process of self-development which accompanies learning. On the other hand, Tománek<sup>36</sup> highlights the importance of internal motivation in achieving learning goals and, more generally, success in life.

A teacher with sufficient motivation can better convey content knowledge and be able to do his work with greater commitment. It is important that teachers constantly work to improve their skills and practical skills, but also that they find tools to prevent the burn-out syndrome, which can negatively affect their long-time performance and thus, indirectly, the perception of the profession as such.

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<sup>34</sup> P. Tománek, *Fragmenty rodiny: manželstvo a rodina v súdnej sieni*, Tribun, Brno 2019.

<sup>35</sup> P. Tománek, A. Mátejková, *Family and current socialegal measures for its members in the Slovak Republic*, [in:] *Mocna rodina fundamentem zdrowego społeczeństwa*, Uniwersytet Papieski Jana Pawła II w Krakowie, Kraków 2019, pp. 69–89.

<sup>36</sup> P. Tománek, *Fragmenty slova – fragmenty výchovy*, “Testimonium fidei” 2018, vol. 6, iss. 1, pp. 40–48.

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