

# THE CZECH PUBLIC'S OPINIONS ON THE EDUCATIONAL CONTENT OF PHYSICAL EDUCATION IN PRIMARY EDUCATION

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**Abstract:** *The research categorises opinions of Czech Republic citizens on the educational content of physical education in primary education. The paper continues a similar research from 2007 into opinions of the Czech population on the overall quality of physical education.*

*The results were obtained by means of a representative sociological research into the issue of health and healthy lifestyle. The research was carried out in cooperation with the INRES –SONES agency towards the end of 2008.*

*The research involved 1795 respondents aged over 15 and was representative in terms of age, gender and regional citizenship of Czech Republic citizens.*

*The Czech public prefers especially sports activities and compensatory and fitness exercises in physical education. As for the educational performance of PE teachers, respondents mostly appreciate patience when working with children, but are critical of PE classes as being physically over-demanding. Nevertheless, more than 40% of respondents do not have any serious objections to teachers' work.*

*The obtained findings inspire a range of concrete suggestions for improving the quality of work in primary schools as well as in teacher training of would-be PE teachers, showing the aspects that should attract most attention. The findings are part of the School and Health for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century research plan.*

**Keywords:** *physical education, educational content, teacher's educational performance, primary school, health education*

## Introduction

The Czech Republic is currently undergoing a curricular reform, which in particular affects primary education. Since the professional public is familiar with the curricular aims of Czech education, we will only mention some basic facts concerning physical education.

The first educational document defining the physical education curriculum is the *Standard for Basic Education* (1995). This document introduced a new educational

area of *Healthy Lifestyle*, which encompasses a traditional educational field of *physical education* and a brand new educational field of *health education*, thus emphasising the function of physical education in enhancing pupils' health awareness.

Since 2007/2008 school year the *Framework Educational Programme for Basic* (i.e. primary and lower secondary) *Education* (2007) has been in operation. This document contains nine educational areas, including the *Humans and Health* educational area encompassing *health education*, *physical education* and *remedial physical education* educational fields. The actual act of defining the above listed areas strengthens the importance of complex education of pupils in health education, and the role of physical education as a subject closely linked to health education.

Physical education enables pupils, on the one hand, to learn about their own physical possibilities and interests; on the other hand, to experience the effects of concrete physical activities on their physical condition and psychic and social well-being. It proceeds from a spontaneous physical activity to an activity that is controlled and selective; the point is to be able to assess the level of personal fitness. A daily regimen should include physical activities satisfying personal physical needs and interests, optimally enhancing fitness and performance, enabling regeneration and compensation for different strains, and supporting health and life protection.

Such a conception of physical education makes more demands on the ways of realization as well as teachers' qualification. Therefore, we may ask a question whether the requirements existing in physical education even prior this new conception were met or not.

## Research problem

Recent experience and research findings indicate that there is a discrepancy between the so called projected curriculum, i.e. the declared educational content, and the so called realized curriculum, i.e. the realized educational content (e.g. Průcha 2002, 2006). The causes of this discrepancy have been explored by means of various methods in physical education<sup>1</sup> as well as health education (e.g. Mužík, Trávníček 2006; Mužík, Janík 2007; Mužíková 2007).

If we draw our attention to assessing the quality of the realized curriculum in a particular educational field, we can, among other things, consider the opinions of school-leavers or graduates in this subject and their retrospective view of the quality of education. Therefore, we have tried to find out what opinions about physical education there are among the Czech public and if these opinions depend on respondents' age and gender. We focused on assessing the quality of physical education during the compulsory school attendance and also on assessing the contemporary quality of physical education in primary education.

The research into the opinions of Czech Republic citizens<sup>2</sup> carried out in 2007 revealed these findings (see Mužík 2009):

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1 Methodological starting points and a review of research into this area were published e.g. in studies by Mužík, Janík (2007), Janíková, Janík, Mužík, Kundera (2008) and others.

2 The sample was representative in terms of gender, age and regional citizenship of Czech Republic citizens aged over 15.

More than three quarters of respondents were satisfied *with the overall quality of physical education during their compulsory school attendance*, the only exception being the youngest group of citizens aged 15 – 19, as it was statistically more significantly dissatisfied than the rest of the population. The most common causes of dissatisfaction were the educational content of physical education and the quality of educational performance of physical education teachers. Other age groups expressed most objections to the educational content<sup>3</sup> of physical education too.

Other reasons for dissatisfaction with physical education in primary education included the extent of education, the quality of sports facilities and equipment, school assessment in physical education etc. These reasons, however, showed a relatively low frequency.

The obtained findings determined the aim of a follow-up research: to specify the opinions of Czech Republic citizens on the educational content and the educational performance of physical education teachers in primary education.

## Research sample

The Czech Republic citizens' opinions were obtained from the sample of 1796 respondents selected randomly by means of quotas. The sample was representative of the Czech population aged over 15. Representativeness was derived from the population of the Czech Republic aged over 15.<sup>4</sup> It can be argued that the results stated below are representative of the Czech population aged over 15 in terms of gender, age and regional citizenship.

Other signs, which were not representative but were observed within the research, included education, marital status, number of children, size of the respondent's residential municipality, occupation, net monthly family income, attitude to religion and type of accommodation. Cases where statistical significance was proved are pointed out. Nevertheless, due to the fact that these data are not representative, revealed statistically significant correlations can be interpreted only as tendencies.

## Research method

The research was designed as a sociological one and was based on questions proposed by the author of this paper. The survey was carried out by means of a standardized guided interview between an interviewer and a respondent.

Data were gathered by 360 interviewers of the *INRES - SONES Agency* across the whole of the Czech Republic. The *INRES - SONES Agency* was also responsible for visual and logical inspection, coding and computerising the data, and for results tabulating. The interpretation of the obtained results was performed by the author of this paper.

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3 The term *educational content* is understood as the content of school education realized by the teachers in classes. *Classes* are considered to be the main form of the teacher's educational performance and pupils' learning performance.

4 See the *Population Structure of the Czech Republic by Major Age Groups in 2007*. (31 Dec. 2007) Prague: Czech Statistical Office, 2008.

The data were statistically processed by the SASD 1.3.0 program (statistical analysis of social data). One-factor analysis and contingency tables for selected signs of two-factor analysis were processed. The correlation level of selected signs was defined by means of chi-square test and other testing criteria, applied according to the character of signs. This analysis served as a basis for subsequent data interpretation.

Respondents' answers were recorded in a written form; answer sheets were verified in a pre-research. The inspection focused on logical relations as well as the level of completeness and information credibility. The sheets with non-functional illogical links and incomplete sheets (when the respondent refused to answer the questions and decided to finish the interview earlier) were excluded. These sheets were placed in the "non-respondents" category.

The assessed items often contained continuous answers, which had to be transformed in such a way that would enable making a clear summary of the main results. The continuous answers were divided into partial statements, and thus the character of the transformed variable signs changed from a continuous to category form.

## Research schedule

The research project was designed in September and October 2008 and was subjected to objecting in the beginning of November 2008. The pre-research verifying the research techniques and formulating the questions to be asked involved a sample of 286 respondents and was carried out in November 2008. Simultaneously, all interviewers were instructed.

The actual survey was organized across the whole of the Czech Republic at the turn of November and December 2008. In December 2008, the completed answer sheets were gathered and visually and logically inspected. The obtained data were subsequently computerised. The next step involved adjusting the data, their basic mathematical and statistical analysis, processing frequency and selected contingency tables, and primary data interpretation.

The results were interpreted by the author in the beginning of 2009.

## Results

### **a) Opinions of Czech Republic citizens on the educational content of physical education**

The aim of the research was to find out the opinion of Czech Republic citizens on the educational content of physical education in primary education. This objective was surveyed by means of a semi-open question:

*“Do you think that physical education in primary schools should include these thematic areas (you may mark at most 3 areas that you consider the most important)?”*

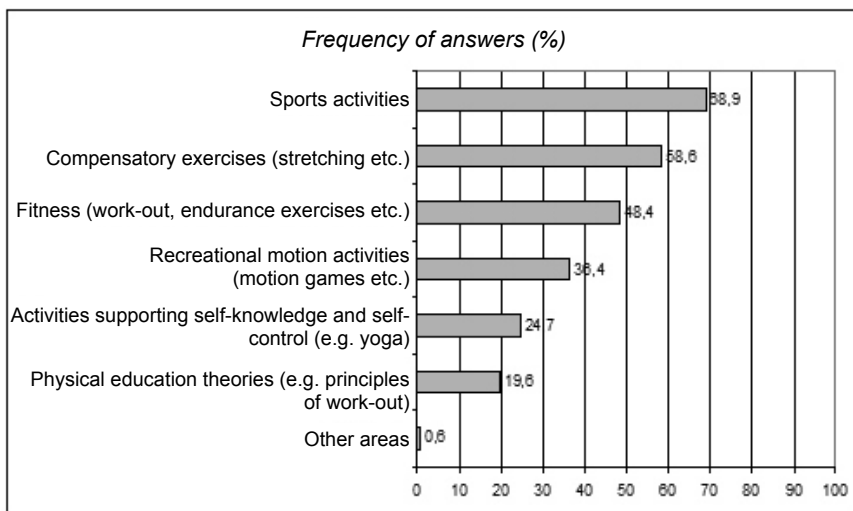
The respondents therefore had a chance to mark up to 3 possibilities from the following range of answers, or state in their own words which area they considered important.

The list of possible answers:

- sports activities and sports games (athletics, gymnastics, basketball, volleyball etc.),
- recreational motion activities (self-enjoying motion games, non-traditional activities such as juggling, activities chosen by pupils etc.),
- fitness exercises for optimal fitness development (muscle strength and endurance in particular),
- compensatory exercises preventing weakening of the skeletal and muscular system and posture (stretching, body-building and relaxing exercises),
- motion activities supporting self-knowledge and self-control (yoga for children etc.),
- physical education and sports theories (concerning motion strain, muscle weakness, measuring and assessing fitness etc.),
- other thematic areas (state which).

The interpretation of the answers has revealed the following results:

As for the educational content of physical education, Czech Republic citizens consider sports activities and sports games to be the most important. This area is preferred by more than two thirds of Czech Republic citizens (68.9 % of respondents). Compensatory exercises as a preventive measure of weakening of the skeletal and muscular system ranks as the second (58.6 % of respondents) and fitness exercises for optimal fitness development (48.4 % of respondents) rank as the third one. According to respondents, these thematic areas should constitute the core of physical education. Recreational motion activities are less preferred (36.4 % of respondents) together with motion activities supporting self-knowledge and self-control with approximately a quarter of respondents (24.7 %) believing it is important to include them. Only 19.6 % of respondents are of the opinion that the theory of physical education and sports is relevant; other areas practically were not suggested.



Graph 1 Preferred areas in the educational content of physical education (n=1792)

The opinion on the importance of the individual thematic areas depends on respondents' gender. Activities in the form of sport and sports games are more preferred by men than women ( $p = 0.01$ ); women consider compensatory activities preventing weakening of the skeletal and muscular system and body posture ( $p = 0.01$ ), and motion activities supporting self-knowledge and self-control ( $p = 0.001$ ) more important. Other statistically significant differences have not been revealed, which means that the distribution within individual groups defined according to other socio-demographic characteristics in principle resembles the distribution within the whole sample population.

## **b) Opinions of Czech Republic citizens on the educational performance of PE teachers**

The second area of the research focused on the educational performance of physical education teachers, as it closely corresponded with and also influenced the researched educational content of physical education. The Czech Republic citizens were asked about what they valued or were strongly critical of as regards the educational performance of teachers of this subject. In both cases, the questions were formulated as semi-open and respondents expressed their views in their own words. These views were then subjected to content analysis and coded in a way enabling their interpretation.

The question revealing what the citizens are mostly critical of was put as follows:

*“What are you strongly critical of as regards the educational performance of PE teachers in primary schools? Comment on the question briefly in your own words.”*

The content analysis of the individual comments determined the following categories of answers.

- Bad behaviour to children: “aggression, fits of rage, arrogance, humiliation, being inconsiderate, moodiness, ordering around, ridicule, stressfulness, nervousness, being unrealistic, impatience, intolerance, superiority, bullying, short temper, vulgarity, scream, physical punishments” etc.
- No interest in education: “no interest in children, unconcern, carelessness, laziness, laxity, low involvement, inconsistency, reluctance to teaching, slackness, passivity, showing not enough attention to children, neglecting safety rules, leaving children unsupervised” etc.
- Low quality of education: “mistakes in education, absence of individual approach, not differentiating between those showing talents for physical activities and the others, siding those being fit, low demands, lack of hardness, insufficient strictness, inability to exercise authority, low activity, not demonstrating the exercises, not exercising with children, not being objective” etc.
- Monotonousness of education: sticking to curriculum at all costs, mechanical assessment according to tables of norms, poor creativity, stereotype, low variety in classes, low effort to attract children, poor motivation of children, monotonousness, boredom, tediousness” etc.
- Unreasonably demanding education: “too many activities, too much running, unreasonable demands, pushing into activities pupils are not good at, unreasonable

harshness, too much activity, unreasonable ambitions, demanding or unreasonable requirements surpassing children's abilities, unreasonable strictness" etc.

- Non-professionalism: under-qualification, insufficient expertise, non-professionalism, absence of relevant qualification, bad physical condition, ignorance of PE as a discipline" etc.
- A lack of motion activities: "poor offer of sports activities, a lack of motion activities at school and in after-school activities" etc.
- Other objections (not directly concerning the educational performance of PE teachers).
- Is not critical of anything.
- Does not know, cannot form an opinion.

Fifty-eight respondents (i.e. 3.2 % of the overall number) were not willing to answer the question concerning the strongly criticised features of the educational performance of PE teachers in primary schools.

More than a fifth of Czech Republic citizens (21.9 %) do not have any objections to work of primary schools PE teachers, other 19 % of them do not know which critical remarks they could state, which means that more than 40 % of Czech Republic citizens are not critical of the educational performance of PE teachers either because they value and appreciate their work, and therefore do not criticize anything, or because they do not have sufficient information about their work, and thus do not feel competent enough to answer the question.

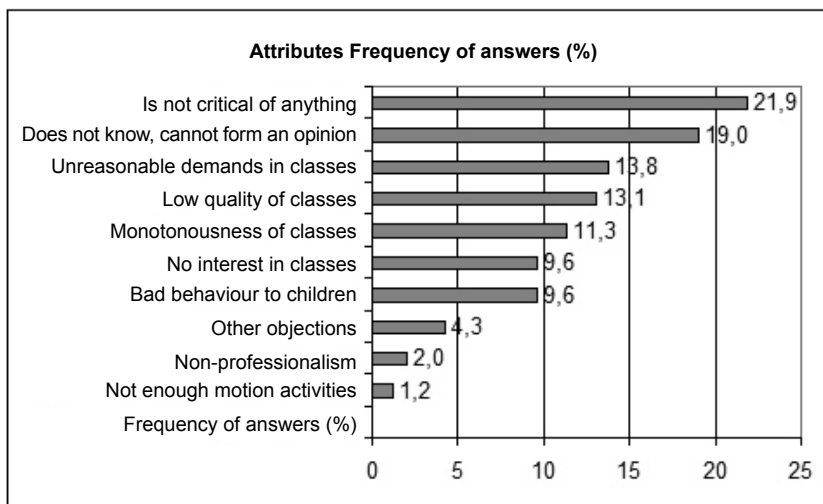
The critical comments concerning the educational performance of primary school PE teachers are relatively equal and none of them significantly outnumbers the others. The most common objection is the one concerning unreasonable physical demands, which are placed on pupils in physical education classes (13.8 % of respondents). Within this group of objections the citizens state that there are unnecessarily too many activities in PE classes and pupils are pushed into activities they do not manage; they experience unreasonable harshness and strictness; they are exposed to excessive activity of the teacher; and face physically demanding or unreasonable requirements inappropriate in respect to children's abilities.

The next group of objections, showing a nearly equal frequency (13.1 %), can be characterised as mistakes in teaching physical education. According to Czech Republic citizens, this involves a low quality of physical education classes, absence of individual approach to pupils, siding children who are fit, insufficient demands and strictness, inability to exercise authority, a low activity of teachers, not demonstrating the assigned exercises, non-objectivity etc.

More than one in ten citizens (11.3 %) are critical of monotonousness and low variety in education, mechanic assessment according to tables of norms, poor creativity, stereotypical classes, low effort to attract children, inability to motivate children, monotonousness, tediousness of physical education etc.

Another rather frequent critical comment concerns inappropriate/bad behaviour of PE teachers towards children (9.6 % of respondents). The respondents criticize especially manifestations of aggression, fits of rage, arrogance, humiliation, inconsideration, moodiness, ordering around, ridicule, stressfulness, nervousness, being unrealistic,

impatience, intolerance, superiority, bullying, short temper, vulgarity, scream, physical punishments etc. A group of remarks criticizing low interest of teachers in physical education classes is equally numerous (9.6%).



Graph 2 Criticized attributes of the educational performance of PE teachers (n = 1738)

As for statistically significant correlations, it must be pointed out that the application of testing criteria was limited due to a high number of categories defined, and therefore also a low number of cases in some squares of contingency tables. The tests, nevertheless, reveal several tendencies: The youngest age groups of citizens (15 – 24 years) significantly more often criticize monotonous classes and mechanical assessment according to tables of norms ( $p = 0.0001$ ) while the oldest group (aged 65 and over) more often chooses the answer “I do not know” ( $p = 0.001$ ).

As regards education, respondents with vocational training significantly more often do not criticize anything or state that they do not know ( $p = 0.01$ ). Respondents with “maturita” exam are critical of monotonousness of classes and mechanical assessment based on tables of norms ( $p = 0.001$ ). Respondents with university education are more often critical of the overall low quality of physical education ( $p = 0.01$ ).

Czech Republic citizens were by means of another semi-open question asked about what they most appreciate about the educational performance of PE teachers. The question had the following wording:

*“What do you most appreciate about the educational performance of PE teachers in primary schools? Comment on the question briefly in your own words.”*

Similarly to the previous case, respondents’ answers were subjected to content analysis which led to defining the following categories:

- Patience: “patient relationship, patient approach to children” etc.

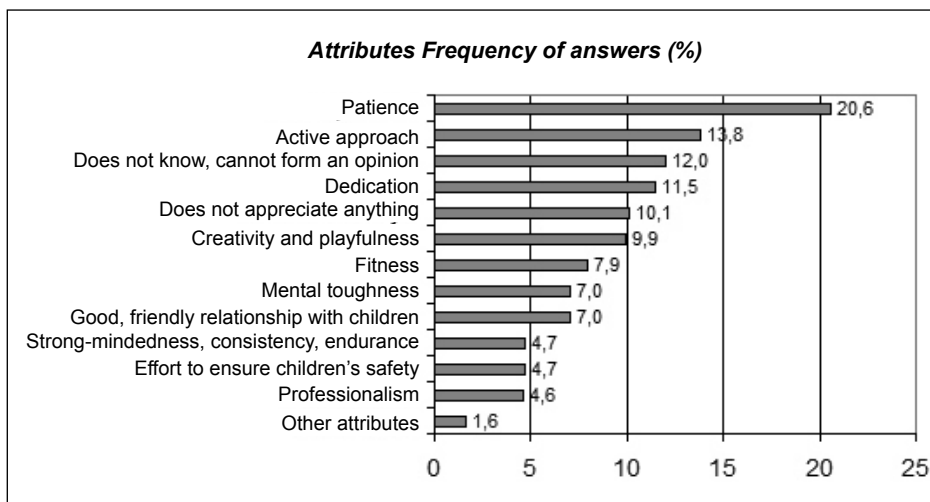


- Dedication: “diligence, enthusiasm, involvement, sedulousness, unselfishness, vitality, interest, optimism, good mood, helpfulness, desire to work, desire to exercise, desire to work with children, interest, zeal, effort, strenuousness” etc.
- Creativity and playfulness: “ability to motivate and attract children, ability to involve them in games, ideas, variety, ability to entertain children, creativity, diversity, resourcefulness, inventiveness” etc.
- Good, friendly relationship with children: “helpful approach to children, empathy towards children, sensitive approach to pupils, friendly behaviour, understanding, tolerance, clemency, communicativeness, consideration, tact, helping pupils, objectivity, sense of fair-play” etc.
- Active approach: “activity, initiating activities for children, exercising with children, motion, flexibility, vitality, encouraging children to be active, ability to activate children, leading children to doing sports, health and healthy lifestyle” etc.
- Fitness: “endurance, being fit, agility, strength, fitness level, prowess, efficiency, ability to demonstrate exercises, join the activities, serve as a good example” etc.
- Mental toughness: “level-headedness, strong will, mental resilience” etc.
- Effort to ensure children’s safety: “ability to prevent injuries, watchfulness, courage, responsibility, caution” etc.
- Strong-mindedness, consistency, endurance: “doggedness, determination” etc.
- Professionalism: “organising skills, skilfulness, versatility, general skills, ability to exercise authority and respect, ability to recognise talents and enhance them, experience, general education, general preparation” etc.
- Other attributes: “organization of after/outside-school activities, swimming courses, skiing courses; all traits together” etc.
- Does not know, cannot form an opinion: “I do not have any information or experience” etc.
- Does not appreciate anything.

Twenty-three respondents refused to answer the above question, which accounts for 1.3 % of the total number of persons surveyed.

As regards the educational performance of primary schools PE teachers, Czech Republic citizens value especially patience for children and pursuing this profession. This trait is appreciated by 20.6 % of respondents. The second most frequent feature is active approach of PE teachers (13.8 % of respondents), the third one then dedication, hard-work and enthusiasm showed when realizing PE classes. These attributes were valued by 11.8 % of respondents. The relative frequency of the other categories is less than 10 %.

About one in ten citizens (10.1 %) state that there is nothing they appreciate about the educational performance of primary school PE teachers, other 12.0 % of respondents do not know or cannot form an opinion on teachers’ work.



Graph 3 Appreciated attributes of the educational performance of PE teachers  
(n = 1772)

The tests of statistical significance signal mild correlations between some socio-demographic characteristics and appreciation of the educational performance of PE teachers; however, due to a high number of categories the condition of a sufficient number of cases in individual squares of contingency tables was not met, which made the possibility of their application rather limited. From this perspective, it seems to be clear that male respondents value dedication, diligence and enthusiasm ( $p = 0.05$ ), but at the same time statistically more significantly answer “I do not know” ( $p = 0.05$ ). Female respondents, on the other hand, place greater emphasis on creativity, playfulness and variety ( $p = 0.05$ ), and appreciate teachers’ responsibility and their effort to ensure children’s safety ( $p = 0.05$ ).

Respondents of the youngest age group (aged 15 – 19) emphasize especially creativity, playfulness and variety ( $p = 0.001$ ), while the oldest citizens (aged 65 and over) more commonly answer “I do not know” or “I cannot form an opinion” ( $p = 0.001$ ). Citizens with university education appreciate especially dedication ( $p = 0.01$ ) and teachers’ professionalism ( $p = 0.01$ ).

## Conclusion

The sociological research from 2007 identified main reasons for satisfaction and dissatisfaction of Czech Republic citizens with physical education in primary education. The most significant reasons for dissatisfaction were the educational content of PE classes and the quality of the educational performance of PE teachers. These attributes of the educational process were in the centre of attention in a follow-up research carried out in 2008.

The follow-up research revealed these inspiring findings:

The Czech Republic citizens hold that the most important thematic areas which

should be part of physical education in primary schools involve activities in the form of sport and sports games, compensatory exercises as a prevention of weakening of the skeletal and muscular system and fitness exercises for optimal development of fitness.

The most common objection to the educational performance of PE teachers is that they set tasks that are too physically demanding for pupils, and they do not consider pupils' individual abilities or skills. Czech Republic citizens are also critical of inadequate behaviour, monotonous classes and mechanical assessment based on tables of norms. At the same time, however, it is necessary to point out that around two fifths of Czech Republic citizens are not critical of the PE teachers' work at all, or feel not competent enough to assess their work.

Czech Republic citizens speak highly of PE teachers' work too. They appreciate the patience they show when working with children. What is more, they also value active approach, devotion, diligence and enthusiasm that are characteristic of teachers' attitude to work. Last but not least, they praise resourcefulness and creativity enabling teachers to make their lessons attractive and varied.

The above listed findings lead to recommendations that should be applied not only in teaching profession in primary education, but also in teacher training of would-be PE teachers. It can be recommended to place greater emphasis on areas directly related to promoting health, i.e. compensatory exercises as a prevention of weakening of the skeletal and muscular system, and fitness exercises for the optimal development of fitness. More attention should be also paid to adequate behaviour of PE teachers.

## NÁZORY ČESKÉ VEŘEJNOSTI NA OBSAH VÝUKY TĚLESNÉ VÝCHOVY V ZÁKLADNÍM VZDĚLÁVÁNÍ

**Abstrakt:** Provedený výzkum kategorizuje názory občanů České republiky na obsah výuky v tělesné výchově v základním vzdělávání. Příspěvek navazuje na obdobný výzkum z roku 2007 týkající se české populace na celkovou úroveň tělesné výchovy.

Výsledky byly získány na základě reprezentativního sociologického výzkumu k problematice zdraví a zdravého způsobu života. Výzkum byl realizován ve spolupráci s agenturou INRES - SONES na konci roku 2008.

Výzkumu se zúčastnilo 1795 respondentů ve věku nad 15 let. Soubor byl reprezentativní z hlediska věku, pohlaví a regionální příslušnosti občanů České republiky.

Česká veřejnost ve výuce tělesné výchovy preferuje zejména sportovní aktivity a kompenzační a kondiční cvičení. Na vzdělávací činnosti učitelů nejčastěji oceňují trpělivost při práci s dětmi a kritizují nepřiměřenou fyzickou náročnost výuky. Více než 40 % respondentů však nemá k činnosti učitelů vážnější výhrady.

Získané poznatky poskytují řadu konkrétních podnětů pro zkvalitnění práce na základních školách i v přípravě učitelů tělesné výchovy. Ukazují, na které aspekty je třeba zaměřit hlavní pozornost. Výsledky jsou příspěvkem k řešení výzkumného záměru *Škola a zdraví pro 21. století*.

**Klíčová slova:** tělesná výchova, obsah výuky, vzdělávací činnost učitele, základní vzdělávání, výchova ke zdraví