

# THE CHARACTERISTICS OF AN IDEAL PHYSICAL EDUCATION TEACHER

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## ABSTRACT

*The process of teaching and learning involves the interaction of the teacher, learner and content. Teachers, however, assume the leadership role which facilitates the learner to acquire the knowledge as well as skills in Physical Education. Basing on a situation specific leadership theory, this paper argues that despite the many demands that are brought to bear on the teacher-learner interaction process. This study sought to establish the Physical Education under-graduates' perception of the ideal teacher. From the many characteristics, the highly rated characteristics were identified including ability to communicate ideas, thorough knowledge matter, knowledge of subject matter, high standards of honesty and integrity knowledge of child psychology and ability to gain respect and confidence of pupils, among others. It was therefore recommended that the teacher preparation process targets those elements that are likely to enhance the teachers' standing in the eyes of the learners thus facilitating a good delivery service. Further research on more comprehensive levels is recommended in order to make the teacher training process more relevant to turning out teachers who are best suited for the demands of the job, the learners as well as the community.*

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## INTRODUCTION

In the teaching profession, attempts have been made to identify the characteristics of effective teachers. The teaching and learning process is a complex one. It demands various qualities on the part of the teacher if learning has to take place. Some of the outstanding characteristics of effective teachers include being an authority in the subject matter as well as the methods of imparting the knowledge (Adeyemi, 1989). The knowledge of the subject matter and the methods of instruction are not enough to make one a good teacher. According to (Adeyemi, 1989) a teacher must also have certain other characteristics before he can be regarded as a good teacher.

Ellena, Stevenson and Webb in Combs (1970) surveyed the views of the teachers in the United States and came up with a list of characteristics of a good teacher.

According to them, a good teacher should:- know the subject, know much about related subjects, be adaptable to new knowledge, understand the process of becoming, recognize individual differences, be a good communicator, develop an inquiry mind, be available, be committed, be enthusiastic, have a sense of humour, have humility, be sincere and honest, act with integrity, be creative, be versatile, among others.

It is apparent that the teacher should be an expert in the subject area in terms of knowledge, pedagogy as well as having outstanding character. Adeyemi (1989) sought to find out from social studies undergraduates, the qualities a social studies teacher should possess. The findings in order of rank were:- knowledge of subject matter, superb method of teaching, self confidence and effective communication skill, states objectives of teaching, fair examination results,

encourages the art of inquiry and questioning, gives notes to students, welcomes divergent opinions, gives assignments, marks and returns them in time, fair and impartial, among others.

The author, therefore, concluded that social studies students perceive the good social studies teacher as one who has a rich and extensive knowledge both in breadth and in depth about his discipline, well informed and one, who can share his knowledge through effective method of teaching. According to Osibodu in Adeyemi (1989), teaching should be seen as an important process for imparting knowledge. Otherwise of what use is knowledge that is not imparted?

Having dealt with the characteristics of an effective teacher, it may be helpful to consider the theoretical background to the study of personal characteristics of teachers, especially in physical education. Physical Education refers to that part of total education, which contributes to the development of the individual through the medium of physical activity. It is defined as the school-centred programme of physical activities (Singh, 1982). However, sport refers to the formal and informal competitive, recreational, as well as physical exercise both within and outside the school. For purposes of this paper, physical education refers to organized physical activity (sporting) both within and outside the school (Njororai, 1994). Physical Education teachers are charged with the responsibility of not only teaching in the formal classroom situation, but also of administering and managing the school based sporting activities as well as in the community.

Physical Education teachers are leaders. It is, therefore, pertinent to consider their personal characteristics within the scope of social psychology of leadership. The modern view of leadership in social psychology emphasizes the fact that the situation, the activity and the people involved may demand different leadership

qualities and attributes if one has to be effective (Kane, 1975). This situational approach therefore acknowledges and approves the active role of the followers if leadership is to be effective. The personal characteristics that bring success in one sport context may not be the same required in a different one. Diverse situations require that the teacher relies not only on his personal attributes, but also personal resources that will facilitate effective interaction with the learners in continually changing situations. According to Fiedler in Kane (1975), leadership may depend on both stable characteristics and other variable factors such as the ability of the group member, the nature of the task and the social context, which may require special situational specific transactional abilities from the leader. This argument is in line with approaches in social psychology of leadership which focus their attention on the legitimacy of the leadership position, his influence and responsibility for initiating structure, innovation and on leader perceptiveness (Kane, 1975).

#### **P. E. TEACHER**

The process of teaching and learning involves the interaction of the teacher and the learner. In Physical Education (P.E.), a teacher, on most occasion, goes to the field, gives instructions, supervises the performance and dismisses the learners back to class and then walks away feeling that learning has taken place. In the school situation, the P.E. teacher plays a significant role in introducing the sports skills to the learners both in class and during sports time.

The Physical Education teacher is therefore, involved to some extent in influencing the sports involvement, sports skills learning and the sports performance of young people (Kane, 1975). The extent of involvement in sport by the learners would be a pointer to the effectiveness of the teacher. Additionally, it can be argued that effective physical education teachers

may have much in common with respect to personal characteristics (Ibid).

Kane (1975) carried out a study on the personality characteristics of men and women physical education teachers drawn from secondary schools in England and Wales. The teachers, who were representatives of a wide teaching experience and age range, were asked to consider and rate twenty four items relating to a number of personal attributes and abilities. The attributes that were ranked among the top six included ability to gain respect of pupils, ability to communicate ideas, ability to inspire confidence, knowledge of subject matter, honesty and integrity and capacity for sustained hard work.

These attributes were basically on the operational side of teaching. Kane's findings concur with Singer's (1972) list of attributes including: intelligence, dedication, character, ability to communicate and ability to organize. The qualities such as extroverted personality and general cultural background, were rated lowest by the teachers.

A study by Hendry (1975) on the physical educator's role showed that while pupils perceive many admirable qualities in the physical educator, they are also aware of his aggression, quick temper and the greater attention given to the more highly skilled performers. Teachers who tend to identify with certain pupils produce a differential socialization process with some pupils showing some indifference, while successful performers show more dedication and aggressive achievement. According to Hendry (1975), a teacher who also had a successful sports team was accorded higher status.

Knowledge of personality of the individuals involved in the teaching and learning process is vital as such information can be put to positive use, including:-

- i) A better understanding of an individual's behavior tendencies;
- ii) Teacher – interactions can be better effected by producing situations which can eliminate undesirable consequences;
- iii) Learners' manipulation may be improved to the extent of trying to maximize learning, training, participation and better performance;
- iv) Perception of the learners' abilities vis-à-vis their personality and skill performance, and
- v) Repeated assessment of personality changes can help in readjusting the teacher – learner interaction process (Lewellyn and Blucker, 1982).

The studies reviewed seem to point towards certain relatively stable behavioral supports that physical education teachers share and require for effective functioning. Kane (1975) summarizes the factors that comprise the personality resources necessary for the successful teacher/coach as dedication, character, sensitivity to others and ability to communicate and organize. These findings emphasize the pastoral and broad educational commitment of the teachers.

However, the reviewed studies have been carried out outside the Kenyan context. The characteristics of an ideal or good physical education teacher in a Kenyan context may differ from the findings established elsewhere. In addition, most studies done have considered the P.E. teacher and coach as one. However, given the different social atmosphere in which they function there is need for each to be considered separately. This study therefore was carried out with a view of coming up with characteristics that are valued in a physical education teacher in the Kenyan context.

## **SUBJECTS AND METHOD**

The sample was made up of 62 physical education undergraduates at Kenyatta University in Kenya. The students were made up of twenty three (23) females and thirty-nine (39) males.

The research method used to collect the data included posing the question; 'How important for a physical education teacher do you think is each of the following characteristic?'. The main objective was to obtain the physical education trainees' perceived characteristics of the ideal P.E. teacher. The question was followed by a list of 24 characteristics that the respondents were to rate. The rating was done by each subject independently. This

approach and instrument were adapted from Kane (1975) who used the same on a sample of secondary schools P.E. teachers in England and Wales. Each item in the instrument was rated on a five point scale from one (very important) to five (not at all important). The responses were descriptively analyzed using the frequencies, the mean and presented in tables. The instrument and the ratings appear in Table 1.

*Table 1. Rank of P. E. teachers' characteristics*

<b>RANK</b>	<b>ATTRIBUTES</b>	<b>MEAN</b>
1	Ability to communicate ideas	1.1
2	Thorough knowledge of subject matter	1.5
3	High standards of honesty and integrity	1.67
4	Knowledge of child psychology	1.72
5	Ability to gain respect and confidence of pupils	1.8
6	Creative ability	2.0
7	Capacity for sustained handwork	2.1
8	Ability to inspire confidence	2.17
9	Belief in equality of opportunity for everybody	2.2
10	Knowledge of recent developments in education practice	2.2
11	Ability to get on well with others	2.22
12	Good academic record	2.3
13	Contacts within teaching profession	2.6
14	Well spoken and well dressed	2.64
15	Broad cultural knowledge	2.67
16	Capacity for meticulous attention to detail	2.7
17	Pleasing manner and appearance	2.75
18	Maturity of outlook	2.82
19	Interest in social background of pupils	2.83
20	Desire to improve the world and society	2.85
21	Concern for interests and well being of community	2.87
22	Administrative ability	3.0
23	Extroverted personality	3.1
24	Family background in teaching	4.2

**Table 2: Eight Top Ranked Characteristics**

<b>RANK</b>	<b>ATTRIBUTES</b>
1	Ability to communicate ideas
2	Thorough knowledge of subject matter
3	High standards of honesty and integrity
4	Knowledge of child Psychology
5	Ability to gain respect and confidence of pupils
6	Creative ability
7	Capacity for sustained hard work
8	Ability to inspire confidence

**Table 3: Eight Least Ranked Characteristics**

<b>RANK</b>	<b>ATTRIBUTES</b>
24	Family background in teaching
23	Extroverted personality
22	Administrative ability
21	Concern for interests and well being of community
20	Desire to improve the world and society
19	Interest in social background and pupils
18	Maturity of outlook
17	Pleasing manner and appearance

## RESULTS

Table 1 reveals that the trainees considered all the characteristics in the instrument, with the exception of the item 'Family background in teaching' to be relatively important. The attribute of ability to communicate ideas was rated first, followed by a thorough knowledge of subject matter, high standards of honesty and integrity, knowledge of child psychology and ability to gain respect and confidence of pupils respectively in the top five characteristics. The eight attributes considered as most and least important are summarized in Table 2 and Table 3 respectively.

In general, Table 2 emphasizes that the trainees in this study perceived the personal characteristics of the ideal physical educationists in terms of mastery of pedagogy or methods of instruction, subject matter, knowledge of the learner, character and creativity.

The lowest rated items listed in Table 3 gives an impression that the characteristics which go beyond the immediate teaching and learning interaction process are of minimal concern to the trainees.

## DISCUSSION

The physical education undergraduates perceive an ideal teacher as someone well versed in the instructional methods and techniques of imparting knowledge and skills to the learners. The ability to communicate ideas, which is ranked first, should not be interpreted just to mean a verbal articulation of the knowledge and skills but involves all the methodological as well as technical abilities pertaining to effective classroom interaction between the teacher, the content and the learner both verbally and practically. A P.E. teacher should, therefore, be endowed with a rich repertoire of instructional methods so that he is able to utilize whichever is appropriate depending on the existing situation.

The instructional ability goes hand in hand with the knowledge to be imparted to the

learners. The mastery of content in a particular field is ranked second in the list of characteristics. It is, therefore, idealized that a P.E. teacher should be well versed in the theory and practice of various sports disciplines that comprise physical education as well as being in a position to utilize appropriate instructional methods to impart the same to the learners. These findings relatively concur with earlier ones in P.E. (Kane, 1975; Hendry, 1975) as well as those on teachers irrespective of the area of specialization (Adeyemi, 1989; Combs, 1970). Several authors have established that teachers are influential in the development and performance of pupils in a learning environment (Abidha, 1982; Maritim, 1984; Munayi, 1989; Muthwii, 1981; Sifuna, 1973). Maritim (1984) suggested that efforts be made to help teachers become more effective. One area where teachers needed assistance was on how to become aware on how classroom activities influence the outcome of their pupils. The teachers' behaviours that pertain to classroom interaction with pupils are vital. The high rating of the characteristics of communication ability, mastery of knowledge, high standards of honesty and integrity, knowledge of child psychology and ability to gain respect and confidence of pupils has a basis in the expected classroom performance or behaviour of the teacher. This concern is merited as Maritim (1984) suggested that a teacher should become more sensitive to how both his behaviour and those of his pupils shape the classroom interaction and subsequently the performance of the pupils in class.

That sensitivity towards the learners is best exemplified by teachers well grounded in child psychology as well as those with high standards of honesty and integrity. Such characteristics endear the teacher to the learners and in the process gain their respect and confidence thus facilitating the establishment of a good rapport, which is healthy for the learning process. Additionally, the teacher should show some creativity in manipulating situational

elements involving the resources and the learners to the benefit of the learning process. These observations reflect what Kane (1975) referred to as pastoral and broad educational commitment of the ideal P.E. teacher.

The findings, however, question the direct role of the academic record of the teachers. Sifuna (1989) mentioned academic qualifications as an important index that tends to influence the quality of learning. Yet in this study, the attribute pertaining to the academic record was ranked a lowly 12<sup>th</sup> position on the list of characteristics desired in an ideal teacher. The implication may be that the students are more bothered with the direct contributory behaviours of the teacher in the classroom-learning environment as opposed to his status and academic achievements. This finding may be controversial given the major emphasis on academic certificates for purposes of promotion in the teaching profession as opposed to the effectiveness in the actual teaching in class.

All other characteristics are shown in Table 1. An examination of the ranking also shows that P.E. teacher trainees consider vital that a teacher be fair to all, knowledgeable in current developments in education, gets on well with colleagues, commands respect in professional circles, well spoken and dressed, among others.

The characteristics, which though vital ingredients of a good teacher are ranked among the least include extroverted personality, administrative ability, interest and concern for the community, desire to improve the world and society, among others. These characteristics are not directly related to the classroom performance of the teacher. A characteristic that seems to be least desirable in teachers is that of family background in teaching. Over all the results portray the reality in the teaching profession. However, given the changing times and the unique role of physical education and sports teachers, one is bound

to be disappointed. P.E. and sport is a subject that goes beyond the confines of the school. The trainees' perception of a teacher as strictly a 'classroom operator' may be attributed to the lack of a proper foundation of the undergraduates in the universal value of sport to society. The concepts of 'fitness for all' and 'sport for all' currently in vogue are to be propagated in the communities by P.E. teachers. Given the low rating of attributes pertaining to the teachers' role in the community, it behooves the teacher trainers to strive to change such attitudes through a change in curricular to also highlight such communal obligations and services. The teacher education curriculum should address itself to widening the scope of conceptualizing the role of a P.E. and sport programmes, not only in schools but also the local community, are likely to facilitate the attainment of P.E. and sport teacher in society. Production of teachers who value sports for all, which is a universal expectation (UNESCO, 1980).

## CONCLUSION

It is apparent that pre-service teacher trainees at campus level already have strongly held beliefs about teaching particularly on the desirable attributes of a teacher. There is, therefore, a need to design the teacher preparation process which responds to the trainee's perceptions, provide activities and experience which can develop desirable perceptions and to interact favourably with them in order to change long held beliefs which may not be in line with the current thinking in the teaching profession as well as the physical education discipline. It is also vital to note that in the perception of undergraduate P.E. students that an ideal teacher is one who is well versed in the instructional techniques, content, child psychology and with a proper professional outlook characterized by sensitivity and understanding of the learners as well as the capacity to withstand the stress of the work demands. The role of the P.E. and sports teacher in the local communities should be

highlighted in the teacher preparation process.

However, further research on more comprehensive level is recommended in order to make the teacher education process more relevant in producing teachers who are best suited for the demands of the job as well as the learners needs both within the school and community at large.

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