

Systematic Review of Teachers' Role in Building Positive Body Image through Pedagogical and Emotional Support

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ABSTRACT

Positive body image is one of the important factors in shaping students' psychological well-being, but research shows that many adolescents experience dissatisfaction with their bodies due to the influence of social environments and the media. This problem requires teachers to play an active role in creating a supportive learning environment through pedagogical approaches and emotional support. This study aims to systematically review various studies that discuss the contribution of teachers in building a positive body image at school. This study uses the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method by collecting literature from the Scopus and Google Scholar databases (2015-2025) through the stages of identification, selection, and thematic analysis of relevant scientific publications. The review results show that teachers play a significant role in fostering self-acceptance, self-confidence, and positive views of students' bodies through reflective learning strategies, positive role models, empathetic communication, and the integration of body image issues into the curriculum. The discussion reveals that the effectiveness of the teacher's role is greatly influenced by sensitivity to issues of physical diversity, body literacy training, and school policy support. In conclusion, teachers have a strategic position in shaping students' positive body image through conscious pedagogical and emotional interactions. This study implies the importance of strengthening teacher capacity and developing school policies that support the creation of a safe, inclusive learning environment that is oriented towards student welfare.

Keywords: *Body Image, Emotional Support, Pedagogy, Teachers.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Body image is an individual's perception, thoughts, and feelings about their physical appearance, which plays a crucial role in shaping adolescents' identity and psychological well-being (Cash & Smolak, 2011; Grogan, 2016). Adolescence is a critical period in the development of body image because it is marked by significant physical changes, increased social awareness, and sensitivity to the judgments of others (Voelker et al., 2015). However, various studies show that the prevalence of body dissatisfaction among adolescents continues to increase globally, with an estimated 40-70% of adolescents experiencing negative feelings about their physical appearance (Frisén & Holmqvist, 2010; Harriger et al., 2010).

This phenomenon cannot be separated from the influence of social and cultural environments that increasingly emphasize unrealistic standards of beauty and ideal body types. Social media and digital content have created continuous exposure to manipulated body images, encouraging harmful social comparisons, and triggering the

internalization of narrow appearance standards (Perloff, 2014; Fardouly & Vartanian, 2016). The negative effects of poor body image on adolescents include decreased self-esteem, eating disorders, depression, anxiety, and decreased academic performance and interpersonal relationship quality (Neumark-Sztainer et al., 2006; Paxton et al., 2006).

Given that adolescents spend most of their time in the school environment, educational institutions are strategically positioned to promote positive body image (Yager & O'Dea, 2008). Positive body image is defined as acceptance, appreciation, and respect for one's own body, regardless of how it aligns with society's ideal standards (Tylka & Wood-Barcalow, 2015). This concept is not merely the absence of body dissatisfaction, but includes functional appreciation of the body, healthy self-care practices, and a protective filter against negative messages about appearance (Avalos et al., 2005).

In the school context, teachers play a very important but often overlooked role in shaping students' perceptions of body and appearance. Teachers not only serve as facilitators of academic learning, but also as role models, shapers of classroom social norms, and providers of emotional support that can influence students' psychosocial development (Poulton et al., 2016; Richardson & Paxton, 2010). Teachers' daily interactions with students, both through verbal and nonverbal communication, can reinforce or challenge stereotypes related to physical appearance (Haines et al., 2006).

Several studies show that teachers' comments about students' weight, appearance, or physical performance, even when made with good intentions, can have a long-term impact on students' body image (Neumark-Sztainer et al., 2010; Bauer et al., 2017). Conversely, teachers who are trained in body image literacy and apply inclusive pedagogical approaches can effectively build a learning environment that supports self-acceptance and body diversity (O'Dea, 2005; Yager et al., 2013).

Although there is recognition of the importance of teachers' role in shaping a positive body image, empirical research that comprehensively examines the specific contribution of teachers in this context is still limited and scattered across various disciplines. Most body image interventions in schools focus on structured programs delivered by external professionals, with minimal attention to the role of classroom teachers in everyday learning practices (Yager & O'Dea, 2014). In addition, there is still a gap in understanding the most effective pedagogical strategies, the challenges faced by teachers, and the systemic support needed to optimize their role.

Therefore, a systematic review of the existing literature is essential to identify, synthesize, and evaluate scientific evidence on how teachers can contribute to building positive body image in students. This review is expected to provide a theoretical and practical foundation for the development of teacher training programs, school policies,

and classroom-based interventions that are more effective in promoting the psychological well-being of adolescents.

This study aims to systematically review various studies that discuss the role and contribution of teachers in building positive body image among students in the school environment. Specifically, this review will: (1) identify pedagogical strategies and interpersonal approaches used by teachers in promoting positive body image; (2) analyze factors that influence the effectiveness of teachers' roles in this context; (3) explore the challenges and obstacles faced by teachers; and (4) formulate recommendations for educational practices and policies that support the creation of a school environment conducive to the formation of positive body image among students.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1. Research Design

This study uses a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method to identify and analyze research related to the role of teachers in building positive body image among students through pedagogical approaches and emotional support. The SLR approach was selected due to its capacity to provide a comprehensive, transparent, and replicable synthesis of evidence, thereby minimizing potential bias in the review process (Liu, 2024; Li & Xue, 2023). To enhance methodological rigor and reporting transparency, the review process was guided by the PRISMA 2020 framework, which structured the stages of literature identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and inclusion.

2.2. Research Questions

1. What pedagogical strategies do teachers use to promote positive body image among students in school settings?
2. How does teachers' emotional support contribute to students' development of positive body image?
3. What factors influence the effectiveness of teachers' roles in fostering positive body image (e.g., teacher preparation, self-efficacy, institutional support)?
4. What challenges and barriers do teachers face in implementing body image related pedagogical and emotional support practices?

2.3. Data Sources and Search Strategy

The literature search was conducted using two major academic databases: Scopus and Google Scholar, covering publications from 2015 to 2025. These databases were selected due to their broad coverage of peer-reviewed research in education, psychology, and health-related disciplines. The search strategy employed combinations of keywords using Boolean operators, including: “*teacher role*”, “*positive body image*”, “*pedagogical support*”, “*emotional support*”, “*school-based intervention*”,

and “*body image education*”. Reference lists of relevant articles were also screened to identify additional studies.

2.4. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The inclusion criteria for data collection for this article were: (1) articles published between 2015 and 2025, (2) discussing the role of teachers, pedagogical approaches, emotional support, or school interventions related to positive body image, (3) published in peer-reviewed journals, (4) full-text available, (5) written in English or Indonesian, and with a clear methodology. Meanwhile, the exclusion criteria include: (1) articles irrelevant to higher education, (2) editorial publications or conference abstracts without full papers, (3) not discussing the relationship between policy and academic engagement, (4) duplicate articles, and (5) low methodological quality. The exclusion criteria include: (1) articles that are not relevant to the context of school education or do not mention the role of teachers, (2) editorial publications or conference abstracts without full papers, (3) articles that do not discuss the relationship between pedagogy/emotional support and body image, (4) duplicate articles, and (5) articles with low methodological quality or that do not report data adequately.

2.5. Study Selection and Data Analysis

Following the screening and eligibility assessment stages, the selected studies were subjected to a systematic selection and analysis process, with data extraction and analysis conducted concurrently using a structured data extraction sheet adapted from established SLR guidelines (Kitchenham & Charters, 2007).

The included studies were analyzed using thematic synthesis to identify conceptual patterns between articles related to the role of teachers in building a positive body image. The analysis process began with data reduction, which involved selecting information relevant to the research focus, such as pedagogical strategies, emotional support practices, body literacy interventions, and teacher student relationship dynamics. At this stage, initial coding was conducted to form preliminary categories, including teacher modeling, body-positive pedagogy, emotional support practices, inclusive classroom climate, and student body image outcomes (Thomas & Harden, 2008).

The next stage involved data presentation, in which information from each article was organized into a thematic matrix to illustrate relationships between key variables. The findings were then grouped into broader themes, such as the relationship between pedagogical strategies and increased positive body perception, the role of teacher emotional support in fostering psychological safety, the contribution of communication sensitive to body diversity in building student self-acceptance, and the ways in which

an inclusive learning environment strengthens students' emotional well-being (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014).

The final stage consisted of drawing and verifying conclusions, which involved interpreting patterns of findings across studies to produce a narrative synthesis of how teachers contribute to the promotion of positive body image through pedagogical approaches and emotional support. This stage also included cross-study comparison to verify the consistency of findings, ensuring that the resulting synthesis was both accurate and reliable (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

RESULT

To fully understand how teachers contribute to building a positive body image through pedagogical approaches and emotional support, an in-depth review of key findings from various recent studies is necessary. The literature analyzed in this section includes research on teaching strategies that support autonomy, teachers' emotional support practices, the effectiveness of body image education curricula, barriers faced by teachers related to anxiety and self-efficacy, and interventions that are responsive to the cultural context of students. Each study provides a different but complementary perspective, ranging from how student-centered pedagogical approaches increase self-acceptance, how teachers' empathetic communication strengthens emotional security, to how structured curricula and reflective learning can shape healthier body perceptions.

Overall, the literature shows that teachers play a central role as facilitators, role models, and providers of emotional support in creating an inclusive learning environment that values physical diversity and is free from body stigma. Teachers not only convey material, but also shape classroom social norms, guide how students view themselves, and help them interpret cultural pressures related to appearance. Therefore, the synthesis of findings in the following table is designed to show how the various pedagogical approaches and emotional support provided by teachers collectively contribute to the creation of a school ecosystem conducive to the development of a positive body image.

Tabel 1. Table of Systematic Literature Review

Author(s) & Year	Key Findings
Jankauskiene, R., Urmanavicius, D., & Baceviciene, M. (2023). Association between Motivation in Physical Education and Positive Body Image: Mediating and	This study shows that teacher autonomy support in physical education plays a major role in shaping positive body image among Lithuanian adolescents, especially among girls and students who are less physically active. When teachers give choices, respect student preferences, and create a non-judgmental atmosphere, intrinsic motivation increases and directly improves body image perception. These findings

Author(s) & Year	Key Findings
Moderating Effects of Physical Activity Habits.	confirm that a student-centered teaching approach that supports autonomy not only increases participation but also encourages self-acceptance and a more positive body image especially for groups that are vulnerable to body dissatisfaction.
Panganiban, T.D., Camarador, R.A., Tagare, R.L., et al. (2025). Interweaving perceived instructors' emotional support and students' academic resilience in the physical education context through the lens of mindset and attachment theories.	This study shows that teachers' emotional support in physical education plays an important role in strengthening students' academic resilience, while also increasing their engagement and well-being. Through empathetic communication, sensitivity, and a safe learning environment, teachers help students build self-confidence and the ability to cope with pressure, including pressure related to physical appearance. A quality teacher-student relationship has been shown to protect against negative impacts and support the development of a positive body image. These findings emphasize the importance of conscious and responsive pedagogical and emotional interactions in everyday teaching practices.
Xu, H., Song, Z., Liu, W., & Gou, P. (2023). Effectiveness of body image education curriculum in primary schools among grade 4-6 students.	This study shows that a structured body image education curriculum for fourth to sixth graders in China effectively improves body satisfaction and reduces body dissatisfaction across various BMI groups. These findings emphasize the importance of incorporating body image issues into the formal curriculum and training teachers to deliver the material consistently and reflectively. Early intervention has been proven to be more effective than remedial approaches, giving elementary school teachers a strategic role in building the foundations of self-acceptance and positive body image through systematically planned learning.
Hidalgo, S.G., Henning, T., Gomez, F., & Perez, M. (2024). Examining Teacher Concerns and Anxiety on the Implementation of a Universal Body Image Program.	This study highlights that the main obstacles in implementing universal body image programs stem from teachers' anxiety and low self-efficacy, such as fear of speaking incorrectly or discomfort with their own body image. These psychological conditions directly impact the effectiveness of program delivery. Therefore, teachers need to feel competent and comfortable before they can serve as positive role models for students. The study recommends in-depth body literacy training and the use of cognitive modeling to boost teachers' confidence. These findings emphasize that the success of the program depends heavily on school support through adequate professional training, not just on the curriculum design.
Andres, F.E., Thornborrow, T., Bowie, W.N., et al. (2025). Pilot trial assessing acceptability, feasibility, and preliminary effects of a body image intervention for	This study confirms that effective body image interventions must be culturally responsive, taking into account the physical diversity and social context of students. Culturally tailored programs—including media literacy and critique of appearance pressures—are more acceptable and relevant to rural Nicaraguan adolescents. Teachers play a crucial role as

Author(s) & Year	Key Findings
adolescents in rural Nicaragua.	mediators between the material and students' realities through socio-cultural understanding, collaboration with families, and the use of contextually appropriate reflective learning strategies. These findings emphasize the importance of culturally sensitive pedagogical approaches to improve student engagement and body image outcomes.

Table 2. Table of Thematic Analysis

Main Theme	Sub-Themes	Related Studies	Key Recommendations
Pedagogical Strategies for Body Image Promotion	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Autonomy-supportive teaching approaches 2. Student-centered learning methods 3. Structured curriculum integration• Reflective learning strategies 4. Culturally responsive pedagogy 	<p>Jankauskiene et al. (2023) Xu et al. (2023) Andres et al. (2025)</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Provide students with choices in physical activities and learning methods 2. Respect individual preferences and avoid judgmental approaches 3. Integrate body image education into formal curriculum systematically 4. Design curricula that reflect students' cultural contexts and values 5. Use reflective learning strategies that encourage critical thinking about appearance standards
Emotional Support and Teacher-Student Relationships	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Empathetic communication 2. Creating psychologically safe environments 3. Building trust and confidence 4. Quality relational dynamics 5. Emotional sensitivity to student needs 	<p>Panganiban et al. (2025) Jankauskiene et al. (2023)</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Establish consistent emotional availability and responsiveness 2. Develop empathetic communication skills through training 3. Create classroom climates free from body stigma and appearance-based judgment 4. Build secure attachment relationships that buffer against appearance pressures 5. Acknowledge and validate students' emotional experiences related to body image

Main Theme	Sub-Themes	Related Studies	Key Recommendations
Teacher Preparation and Professional Development	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Body literacy training 2. Self-efficacy enhancement 3. Cognitive modeling approaches 3. Addressing teacher anxiety 4. Teachers' own body image concerns 	<p>Hidalgo et al. (2024)</p> <p>Xu et al. (2023)</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Provide comprehensive pre-service and in-service body literacy training 2. Implement cognitive modeling programs to reduce teacher anxiety 3. Address teachers' own body image concerns before program implementation 4. Build teacher confidence through structured professional development 5. Offer ongoing support and peer learning opportunities for teachers
Early Intervention and Prevention	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Timing of interventions 2. Primary school emphasis 3. Preventive vs. remedial approaches 4. Age-appropriate strategies 5. Foundation building for self-acceptance 	Xu et al. (2023)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Prioritize body image education in elementary grades (4-6) 2. Implement preventive programs before body dissatisfaction intensifies 3. Train elementary teachers as key gatekeepers for early intervention 4. Develop age-appropriate curriculum materials for younger students 5. Build foundational self-acceptance skills during critical developmental periods
Cultural Responsiveness and Diversity	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Socio-cultural adaptation of programs 2. Respect for physical diversity 3. Local context integration • Family and community collaboration 4. Media literacy in cultural context 	<p>Andres et al. (2025)</p> <p>Jankauskiene et al. (2023)</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Adapt interventions to reflect local cultural values and appearance norms 2. Collaborate with families to reinforce body-positive messages 3. Develop socio-cultural competence among teachers 4. Integrate media literacy that addresses culture-specific appearance pressures

Main Theme	Sub-Themes	Related Studies	Key Recommendations
			5. Celebrate and validate diverse body types and cultural backgrounds
Systemic and Institutional Support	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. School policy frameworks 2. Resource allocation 3. Training infrastructure 4. Implementation support systems 5. Program sustainability mechanisms 	<p>Hidalgo et al. (2024)</p> <p>Xu et al. (2023)</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Establish school-wide policies supporting body-positive environments 2. Allocate adequate resources for teacher training and program implementation 3. Create institutional support systems for teachers implementing programs 4. Develop sustainable mechanisms for ongoing professional development 5. Foster collaboration between school leadership, teachers, and support staff

DISCUSSION

The synthesized findings reveal that teachers occupy a strategic position at the intersection of curriculum delivery, social norm formation, and emotional support provision. Their role transcends traditional academic instruction, extending into the realm of psychosocial development and identity formation.

Pedagogical Dimension: The evidence strongly supports student-centered, autonomy-supportive approaches over prescriptive or judgmental teaching styles. When teachers position students as active agents in their learning and physical activity choices, they simultaneously foster self-determination and positive self-perception. The effectiveness of structured curricula (Xu et al., 2023) demonstrates that body image promotion need not be incidental but can be intentionally designed into educational programming.

Relational Dimension: The quality of teacher-student relationships emerges as a consistent mediating factor across contexts. Empathetic communication and emotional availability create the psychological foundation necessary for students to challenge negative appearance-related messages and develop body acceptance. This finding aligns with attachment and social learning theories, positioning teachers as secure base figures whose modeling and validation significantly influence students' self-concepts.

Contextual Adaptation: The emphasis on cultural responsiveness (Andres et al., 2025) highlights that effective body image support cannot be one-size-fits-all.

Teachers must develop cultural competence to understand how appearance ideals and body-related pressures manifest differently across communities, and adapt their approaches accordingly.

Implementation Challenges: Critically, the identification of teacher anxiety and self-efficacy barriers (Hidalgo et al., 2024) reveals a frequently overlooked dimension: teachers themselves may struggle with body image issues or lack confidence in addressing this sensitive topic. This finding has important implications for teacher education and professional development, suggesting that effective implementation requires attending to teachers' psychological needs and competencies.

Preventive vs. Remedial Approaches: The evidence favors early, preventive integration of body image education (Xu et al., 2023) rather than reactive interventions after problems emerge. This positions elementary school teachers as particularly crucial in establishing foundational body acceptance before adolescent intensification of appearance concerns.

The collective evidence demonstrates that teachers' contribution to positive body image is not merely about delivering content but encompasses:

1. Modeling healthy attitudes toward physical diversity
2. Creating inclusive classroom cultures that celebrate varied body types
3. Providing responsive emotional support during vulnerable developmental periods
4. Challenging appearance-based stereotypes and biases
5. Integrating body acceptance principles across curriculum areas

However, the effectiveness of these roles is conditional upon:

1. Adequate pre-service and in-service training in body literacy
2. Institutional policies supporting body-positive school cultures
3. Resources for implementing evidence-based programs
4. Ongoing professional development and peer support
5. Attention to teachers' own body image concerns and well-being

The reviewed literature collectively argues for a systemic approach recognizing teachers not as isolated actors but as key implementers within broader educational ecosystems that must support both student and teacher needs to effectively promote positive body image development.

The findings are organized thematically to address the research questions, focusing on pedagogical strategies, emotional support, influencing factors, and implementation challenges related to teachers' roles in promoting positive body image.

4. CONCLUSION

This systematic review confirms that teachers play a strategic role in building positive body image through pedagogical approaches and emotional support. The synthesis of five studies reveals that effective interventions require integrating

autonomy-supportive teaching, structured curriculum, culturally responsive pedagogy, and empathetic communication within psychologically safe learning environments.

The findings address four research objectives: (1) effective strategies include student-centered methods, reflective learning, and curriculum integration; (2) effectiveness depends on teacher preparation, self-efficacy, cultural competence, and institutional support; (3) main challenges involve teacher anxiety, low self-efficacy, and insufficient training; (4) recommendations emphasize body literacy training, cognitive modeling, early intervention in elementary grades, and supportive school policies.

Teachers' contribution extends beyond instruction to modeling healthy attitudes, creating inclusive norms, providing emotional support, and challenging appearance stereotypes. However, realizing this potential requires adequate teacher training, supportive policies, sufficient resources, and attention to teachers' own body image well-being. Success depends on systemic alignment between teacher competencies, classroom practices, school policies, and community engagement.

Practical recommendations include: policymakers should establish body-positive school policies and fund teacher training; teacher education institutions must develop body literacy courses; school administrators should implement whole-school approaches with peer support networks; and classroom teachers should cultivate autonomy-supportive practices and integrate body image topics across curricula. Future research should examine long-term outcomes, cross-cultural variations, and strategies for addressing digital media pressures. Ultimately, investing in teacher education and body-positive institutional cultures can effectively address youth body dissatisfaction and promote holistic student well-being.

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