

Military classes as the driving force of the movement for a positive image of the Polish Armed Forces among young people

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ABSTRACT

The article presents the results of research carried out for the purposes of the doctoral dissertation entitled *Creating the image of the Polish Armed Forces as a guarantor of defence capabilities*. The work draws attention to the importance and essential meaning of military classes in this process. The article presents the history of military classes and the methodological assumptions of the research. A review of research on students of military classes included in the literature on the subject was conducted. The results of the author's own research on the impact of education in military classes on the perception of the Polish Armed Forces were presented, as well as conclusions and recommendations. The research problem of this article is the question: How do students of military classes perceive the current image of the Polish Armed Forces? The aim of the study was to analyse the currently employed measures shaping the image of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Poland in the opinion of the students of military classes.

KEYWORDS

Polish Armed Forces, image, uniformed classes, military security, defence



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Introduction

The challenges which are currently faced by the Polish Armed Forces, apart from modernization plans and purchase of new equipment, are primarily recruitment issues. The Ministry of National Defence is conducting intensified work on rebuilding personnel reserves, increasing the number of operational troops and expanding the newest type of troops – Territorial Defence Force. In this matter, the army must focus on young people. The image of the army as a guarantor of defence and an attractive workplace should be shaped in this social group right from an early age. It is young people who will join the army in the future or choose employment on the civilian labour market [1]. It should be noted that a large group of young people are interested in defence issues. This situation has been observed for many years. Recent history shows that numerous attempts have been made to exploit this potential by organizing various forms of education based on civil-military cooperation. Forms of organization of military classes have not been adequately supported for years. Their development, however, constitutes the basis for generating conclusions and creating recommendations, currently used in the formation of Military Preparation Units.

1. History of military classes in Poland

Although it seems that military (uniformed) classes have always been operating in the school environment, an analysis of the history of their existence indicates that only in recent years have they been properly supported, appreciated and ennobled [2]. The Ministry of National Defence saw significant potential in them in terms of rebuilding the reserve system of the Polish Armed Forces. They are a tool for shaping the image of the army and promoting the profession of soldier among young people – students of other classes in the school and local environment [3]. They are an element of demonstrating the uniform in everyday life, sometimes rarely seen on the streets due to the remoteness or hermetic nature of military units. The support of the military classes allowed for the “channelling and transformation” of young people’s interests in military, patriotic or even historical topics in a utilitarian way, to the benefit of the armed forces and the entire state defence system [3].

Over the years, uniformed classes have encountered problems related to the lack of support, mainly financial, but also technical one (lack of patronage by military units, lack of consistent curriculum). Their existence in the period

preceding the pilot programs – Certified Military Uniformed Classes – is due to the determination of teachers and the unwavering interest in pro-defence issues taken by young people [4].

The path of their development was based on pedagogical experiments and innovations. Numerous legislative changes regarding terminology, principles of operation and organization allowed the creation of a pilot program in 2017 called Certified Military Uniform Classes [5; 6]. The conclusions from its implementation and the amendment introduced to the Education Law allowed for establishing Military Preparation Units, being an actual part of the education system. The Ministry of National Defence has gained the authority to determine class size and the minimum number of lesson hours [7]. It is responsible for preparing the training program in the units [8].

The benefits for students of the units were transferred from the solutions used in military classes. They concern the shortened period of preparatory service, preferences in recruitment to the army, consultations with representatives of the Military Draft Office and currently Military Recruitment Centres. The Ministry of National Defence emphasizes that educational programs implemented both in military classes and units promote the country's defence and the Polish Armed Forces.

2. Research methodology

This article is part of a comprehensive research on the creation of the image of the Polish Armed Forces as a guarantor of defence among students of military classes and youth of secondary schools. For the purposes of the study, a practical goal was formulated: an analysis of the currently used activities shaping the image of the Polish Armed Forces in the opinion of students of military classes.

In the context of comprehensive research on creating the image of the Polish Armed Forces among representatives of Generation Z, the following research thesis was formulated: "Image-building measures, adapted to the perception of Generation Z representatives, contribute to a positive perception of the Polish Armed Forces as a guarantor of defence". As a result of the thesis, the following detailed thesis was formulated for the purposes of the article: "Programs of the Ministry of National Defence regarding support and patronage of secondary school students have a positive impact on the perception of the institution of the Polish Armed Forces and the planning of a career path associated with military service." In order to present the interdependence of

the problem, the research objective and the detailed thesis, they are presented in a tabular form in Table 1.

Table 1. Methodological matrix

Specific problems	Detailed objectives	Detailed theses
How do students of military classes perceive the current image of the Polish Armed Forces?	Analysis of the currently implemented activities shaping the image of the Polish Armed Forces in the opinion of the students of military classes.	Programs of the Ministry of National Defence regarding support and patronage over secondary school students have a positive impact on the institutional perception of the Polish Armed Forces and the planning of a career path associated with military service.

Source: The author's own development.

In this study, quantitative methods in the form of a diagnostic survey were employed. The respondents were students participating in the program of Certified Military Uniformed Classes. The research was conducted using the auditorium survey technique, in which the research tool was a paper questionnaire.

The minimum sample size, given the known population size, was calculated based on the following formula [3; 9]:

$$n_b = \frac{N}{1 + \left(\frac{4d^2(N-1)}{Z^2}\right)} \quad (1)$$

where:

n_b – minimum sample size;

N – population size;

Z – standard value for a given significance level p ($Z = 1.96$ for $p = 0.05$);

d – assumed estimation error (5%).

The size of the population of military class students in the year for which the minimum research sample was calculated was 6902 students. The above formula shows that the size of the minimum research sample for this population is 364.

Ultimately, the study involved 374 students of military classes who studied in 11 schools participating in the Certified Military Uniformed Classes program. Ultimately, 368 questionnaires were used to develop the results and draw conclusions. Cluster sampling was used in the selection of the sample [10]. In the draw, the clusters consisted of schools attended by students of military classes. The description of the study group is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. The description of the study group

Gender	Women		Men	
Number of respondents	197		171	
Percentage of respondents	54%		46%	
Place of residence	City		Countryside	
Number of respondents	206		162	
Percentage of respondents	54%		46%	
Grade	I	II	III	IV
Number of respondents	72	164	108	24
Percentage of respondents	20%	45%	29%	6%
Professional military service performed by a family member	Yes		No	
Number of respondents	221		147	
Percentage of respondents	60%		40%	

Source: The author's own development.

Among the 368 students surveyed, 54% were women and 46% were men. 54% of the surveyed students lived in cities, and 46% in the countryside. In terms of the level of education, 20% of students attended the first grade, 45% the second grade and 35% attended third and fourth grades (the introduction of this simplification is determined by a small number of fourth-grade students). The research took into account the performance of professional military service by one of the family members (in the past and now). 60% of the surveyed students of military classes had family military traditions, and among 40% of the students, no family member performs or has performed professional military service.

3. Characteristics of students of military classes in research and literature on the subject

Students of uniformed classes are the subject of numerous studies conducted by various scientific and research centres. As a social group of high importance in the context of the desire to tie their future to military service and

to use their potential in the program of rebuilding the state of personnel reserves, they have been described in numerous publications and monographs.

In this part of the thesis, an analysis of the selected research materials concerning students of military classes relevant to this dissertation was carried out. The focus was on issues related to recruitment and patriotism, using the research commissioned by the Ministry of National Defence [11].

Their motives when choosing a secondary school seem to be crucial in terms of future recruitment to the army and ways of promoting the armed forces among young people. The motives for choosing such a secondary school by students of uniformed classes are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Motivation for choosing a secondary school by students of uniformed classes

Motivation	A very important motive	A rather important motive	A low importance motive	An invalid motive
After graduation – the prospect of a career in the army	47%	29%	14%	10%
An opportunity to prove yourself, meet challenges, experience adventure	46%	38%	11%	5%
Patriotism, willingness to serve the homeland	45%	33%	13%	9%
Opportunity to learn military subjects	42%	41%	12%	5%
Making secondary school more attractive	35%	44%	16%	5%
Interests in military issues, military history, military technology	32%	37%	19%	12%
Possibility of wearing a uniform	32%	36%	21%	11%
Expectations of a high level of education	30%	46%	19%	5%
Hopes of achieving a satisfactory material status by serving as a professional soldier	30%	38%	20%	12%
Pension and other benefits professional soldiers are entitled to	30%	35%	23%	12%
The prestige of the position of a professional soldier	30%	35%	22%	13%
After graduation – the prospect of a career outside the military	26%	33%	27%	14%

Motivation	A very important motive	A rather important motive	A low importance motive	An invalid motive
Acquired opinions about the school, military education in the immediate environment	23%	43%	22%	12%
Good information about the educational offer of a uniformed class (interesting action promoting the school)	23%	41%	24%	12%
School location – the issue of commuting	20%	23%	29%	28%
Difficult situation on the civilian labour market	11%	27%	33%	29%
Family traditions	9%	16%	23%	52%
Persuasions (suggestions) from classmates (peers)	5%	14%	30%	51%

Source: [11].

Summarising together very important and rather important motives, it should be stated that young people, enrolling for military classes, primarily want to gain an opportunity to test themselves, face challenges and experience adventure (84%). For 83% of respondents, the possibility of learning military subjects is a strong motivator for choosing a class with a pro-defence profile. Equally high on the list of motives are patriotism and the desire to serve the homeland (78%). Students also justify their choice of military class as a place to study in secondary school with the fact that “after graduating (from the school) – (they gain) the perspective of a career in the army” (76%). Most students seem to be aware of “what they want to do in life” even before entering the profiled class. The least important factors in choosing a military class are family traditions and suggestions of classmates.

The above-mentioned motives indicate that promotional activities should be directed towards young people learning in military classes and Military Preparation Units. Care should be taken in order not to “waste” the potential of students in the perspective of their further military service. The desire to experience adventure and the curiosity of training, which are the most frequently indicated motives, do not give unambiguous certainty that the student will tie their future career with the army. Therefore, it should also be permanently encouraged by using a wide range of public relations techniques and supporting a positive image of the army.

An important issue in the context of the country’s defence is the sense of patriotism among citizens. The distribution of answers to the question: “Do you consider yourself a patriot?” in different social groups is shown in Figure 1.

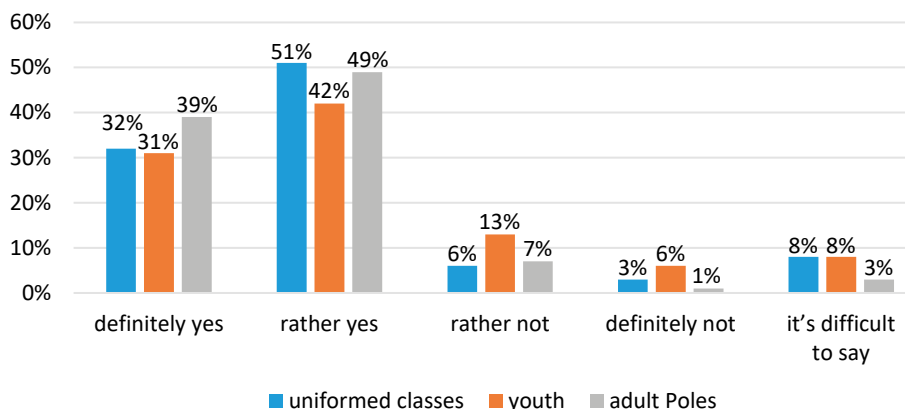


Fig. 1. The distribution of answers to the question: “Do you consider yourself a patriot?”
Source: [11-13].

The vast majority of the students of military classes consider themselves patriots (83%). Comparing this result with the survey conducted among secondary school students, it is 10 percentage points higher. However, declarations of patriotism are the most often made by adult Poles (88%). The fact that students of military classes more often declare their patriotism than their peers is a positive phenomenon. In the course of program classes, their patriotic attitudes will be properly shaped and strengthened, and their declarations of patriotism will be “more mature”.

In the context of shaping the desired patriotic and pro-defence attitudes, the sense of nationality and pride in one’s citizenship is an important factor. Thus, Poles (including uniformed classes, youth, and adults) were asked if and how often they feel proud of being Polish. The distribution of answers to this question is shown in Figure 2.

The vast majority of young people in uniformed classes feel proud of being Polish. The students of military classes are more likely to feel proud of being Polish compared to their peers. This situation can be explained by their more frequent participation in patriotic and military celebrations aimed at strengthening national identity.

Young people studying in military classes most often based their choice of secondary school profile on the ability to prove themselves, face challenges and experience adventure. They are characterized by a higher sense of

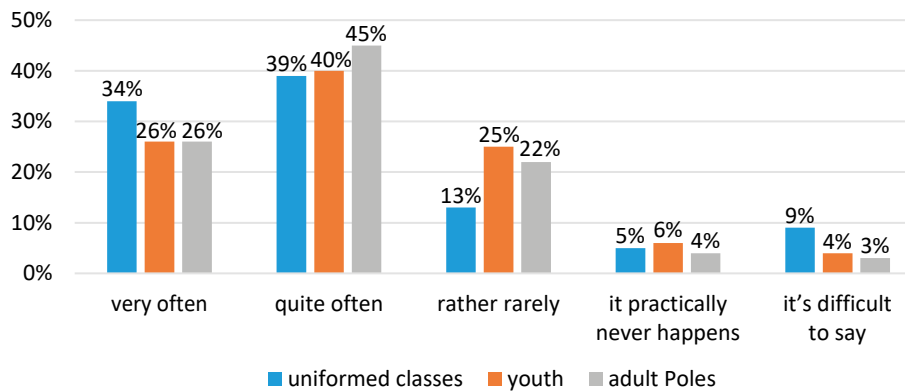


Fig. 2. The distribution of answers to the question: “Do you feel proud of being Polish and how often do you feel so?”

Source: [11].

patriotism and pride in national affiliation compared to their peers. Concerning this group, actions should be directed to “convert” their interest in military matters into the choice of a professional path in the Polish Armed Forces.

4. The impact of attending military classes on the perception of the Polish Armed Forces

Military classes should be seen as a natural resource of the armed forces in the recruitment context. At the same time, they are a natural partner of the army in terms of measures creating a positive image of the army. In this context, they perform a dual function – they are the recipient of the content and its propagator not only in the school environment but also in local communities.

The curriculum in military classes and the Military Preparation Units is aimed at promoting the defence of the country and the army and is an important element in the system of rebuilding the personnel reserves of the Polish army.

In accordance with the research assumptions, for the purposes of this article, the following specific objective was adopted: Diagnosis of the currently implemented measures shaping the image of the Polish Army in the opinion of students of military classes using the author’s own research. It was assumed that: Programs of the Ministry of National Defence regarding the support and patronage of secondary school youth have a positive impact on the perception

of the institution of the Polish Armed Forces and the planning of the professional path associated with military service.

In the study, the respondents were asked to provide information on the change in the perception of the Polish Armed Forces during their education in military class. The distribution of answers to the question is shown in Figure 3.

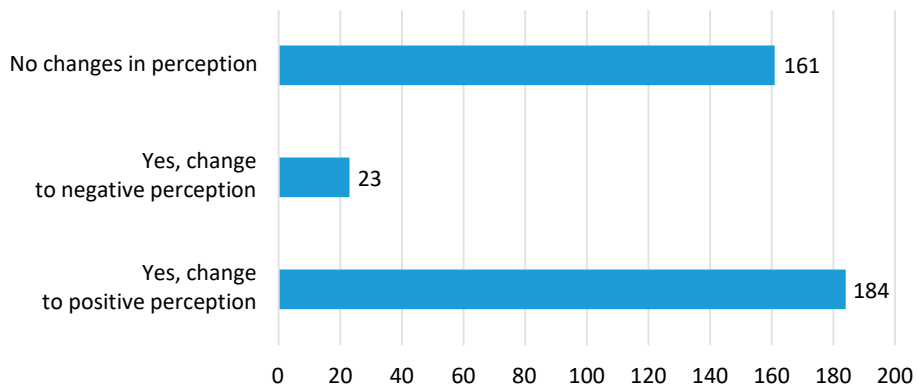


Fig. 3. The answers given by the surveyed students of military classes to the question: "Did you change your perception of the Polish Armed Forces while studying in a military class?"

Source: The author's own development.

Education in a military class, regardless of gender, place of residence and military family traditions, clearly changes the perception of the Armed Forces to a positive one. Only 6% of respondents were discouraged from joining the Polish Army by studying in a profiled class. The positive impact on the perception of the Polish Armed Forces caused by learning in a military class allows one to formulate a recommendation regarding the increase in the number of schools covered by the program of Military Preparation Units.

In the further part of the study, an attempt was made to identify the causes of changes in the perception of the Polish Armed Forces, both positive and negative ones. The students whose attitude changed to a positive one were asked for a brief explanation of their previous response. The question was open-ended. Answers were provided by 53% of students. The distribution of responses is presented in Table 4.

The responses provided by the students were aggregated and organized to formulate the fundamental reasons for the positive change in perception of the military as a result of their enrolment in the military class. A significant 43% share of the respondents justified their responses by acquiring knowledge and reliable information about the military and its duties, gaining the

Table 4. The justification for the responses of students in military classes who experienced a positive change in their perception of the Polish Armed Forces

No.	The justification for the change in the perception of the Polish Armed Forces to a positive one	Number of indications	Percentage of indications [%]
1.	Acquiring knowledge and reliable information about the military and its tasks, gaining an understanding of military skills, the course, and the realities of military service	42	43
2.	Appreciating the effort that soldiers put into their daily service, admiring soldiers for their training, and realizing that military service is demanding and challenging	11	11
3.	Completing military training and acquiring new skills	10	10
4.	Recognition of the military as one's own passion	9	9
5.	Building patriotic attitudes, love for homeland and the ethos	8	8
6.	Contact and meetings with soldiers	7	7
7.	Motivation to serve, gaining the conviction and awareness that one desires to do it	7	7
8.	The military's role in the security system is a significant and responsible profession	6	6
9.	Self-development	5	5
10.	The military is an interesting workplace	4	4
11.	Tradition	3	3
12.	Respect for the uniform	3	3
13.	Elitism	3	3
14.	Positive environment and atmosphere within the army	3	3
15.	Building friendships and fostering positive interpersonal relationships	3	3
16.	Visits to military units	3	3
17.	Teaching staff	2	2
18.	Respect for soldiers who dedicate their lives to Poland	2	2
19.	Military equipment and its modernization	2	2
20.	Military training areas	2	2

No.	The justification for the change in the perception of the Polish Armed Forces to a positive one	Number of indications	Percentage of indications [%]
21.	Change of perspective and views on military service	2	2
22.	Challenges	2	2
23.	Military professionalism	2	2
24.	Sport	1	1
25.	Offering assistance with military recruitment	1	1
26.	Discipline	1	1
27.	Overcoming one's weaknesses	1	1

Source: The author's own development.

understanding of military skills, practices, and the realities of service; 11% of the respondents stated that the military class allowed them to appreciate the effort that soldiers put into their daily service; they hold a deep admiration for soldiers due to their rigorous training and are acutely aware of the demanding nature of military service; 10% of the respondents value the opportunity to undergo military training and acquire new skills. These reasons can be instrumental in launching initiatives that shape a positive image of the Polish Armed Forces, offering additional benefits and opportunities associated with enrolling in Military Preparation Units.

In the survey, students were asked to provide reasons for their negative change in attitude. The question was open-ended. Answers were provided by 61% of the respondents. The distribution of responses is presented in Table 5.

The most significant challenges linked to a shift towards a negative perception of the military's image stem from the interpersonal dynamics within the classes. Challenges like these are encountered in secondary schools of all types, regardless of their specific focus.

The Certified Military Uniformed Classes Program is designed to support the system of building personnel reserve for the Polish Armed Forces. Therefore, the crucial matter is for the student to connect their future career with military service. Hence, an attempt was made to collect students' feedback regarding their interest in military service following the completion of their education in the military class. The distribution of responses to the question is presented in Table 6.

Table 5. The justification for the responses of students in military classes who experienced a negative change in their perception of the Polish Armed Forces

No.	The justification for the change in perception of the Polish Armed Forces to a negative one	Number of indications	Percentage of indications [%]
1.	The state of interpersonal relationships and the issue of intolerance	5	36
2.	Atmosphere	2	14
3.	A different perception	2	14
4.	Attitude towards the uniform	2	14
5.	Bureaucracy	1	7
6.	Dissatisfaction with equipment	1	7
7.	Teaching program	1	7
8.	Following orders	1	7
9.	Organisational matters	1	7

Source: The author's own development.

Table 6. The distribution of responses provided by the surveyed students in military classes to the question: "Are you interested in military service?"

Answer	Number of indications	Percentage of indications [%]
Yes	225	61
Difficult to say	85	23
No	58	16

Source: The author's own development.

Over 60% of the respondents express willingness to join military service. 23% of the students have not yet made a decision on this matter. 16% of the respondents do not associate their future with the military. 66% of men and 57% of women are interested in military service. The inclination to pursue military service is affected by family military traditions, with 66% of positive responses from students falling within this variable. Students without military heritage contemplate entering military service in 54% of instances. The place of residence had no impact on the distribution of responses. This outcome

seems to be positive. Efforts should be made to persuade both indecisive individuals and those who are currently opposed to considering military service in the future. The greatest opposition was found among first-year students, underscoring the importance of education in military classes as a means of promoting military service. As mentioned in the preceding section of the article, programs tailored to students interested in defence-related topics play a significant role in the context of personnel reserve rebuilding and increasing the numerical potential of the Polish Armed Forces.

To identify the preferred forms of military service among students in military classes, another question was formulated. The distribution of responses is presented in Table 7.

Table 7. The distribution of responses provided by the surveyed students in military classes to the question: "Which form of military service are you most interested in after completing secondary school?"

No.	Form of service	Number of indications	Percentage of indications [%]
1.	Military Universities	119	53
2.	Professional Military Service	69	30
3.	Territorial Defence Forces	30	13
4.	Academic Legion	7	3

Source: The author's own development.

Students in military classes are most interested in enrolling in military universities after graduation from secondary school. This choice is preferred by 53% of the respondents. A frequently chosen option among the respondents is professional military service (30% of responses). 13% of the respondents consider joining territorial military service, while 3% of the respondents mention the Academic Legion.

During the research conducted, data was collected regarding the impact of education in military classes on the perception of the Polish Army and their future educational and professional preferences related to military service.

Conclusions and recommendations

In the context of this work, students attending military classes should be characterized as individuals with a strong sense of patriotism and pride in their national affiliation. Most often, they based their choice of secondary school profile on the opportunity to test themselves, meet challenges, and experience an adventure. They are characterized by a higher sense of patriotism and pride of national affiliation compared to their peers. In relation to this group, efforts should be directed towards “converting” their interest in the military into a career path in the Polish Armed Forces.

Based on empirical research findings, it is evident that education in military classes significantly contributes to a positive change in the perception of the armed forces. The main reason indicated by students for this state of affairs is acquiring knowledge and reliable information about the military and its duties, gaining an understanding of military skills, practices, and the realities of service. Threats associated with a shift in the perception of the military to a negative one are not primarily caused by the actions of the army but are mainly related to relationships within social environments. Over 60% of the students express a willingness to join military service. Their most preferred path is to study at military universities and become an officer in the Polish Armed Forces in the future. It should be noted that family traditions are a factor influencing students’ career path choices related to military service.

Based on the research data collected, the hypothesis according to which the Ministry of National Defence programs aimed at supporting and sponsoring secondary school students have a positive impact on the perception of the institution which Polish Armed Forces are and on planning a career path related to military service has been confirmed. As a result, a recommendation has been formulated to increase the number of Military Preparation Units, and to expand their presence in additional educational centres. The primary basis for the statement above is the opinions from the respondents who are currently studying in these institutions. Students express the view that the military class has allowed them to appreciate the effort that soldiers put into their daily service. They admire soldiers for their training and are aware that military service is demanding and challenging. The respondents value the opportunity to undergo military training and acquire new skills.

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Klasy wojskowe demiurgiem ruchu na rzecz pozytywnego wizerunku Sił Zbrojnych RP wśród młodzieży

STRESZCZENIE

Artykuł zawiera prezentację wyników badań przeprowadzonych na potrzeby rozprawy doktorskiej pt. *Kreowanie wizerunku Sił Zbrojnych RP jako gwaranta obronności*. W pracy zwrócono uwagę na znaczenie i istotę klas wojskowych w tym procesie. W artykule przedstawiono historię klas wojskowych oraz założenia metodyczne badań. Dokonano przeglądu badań dotyczących uczniów klas wojskowych zawartych w literaturze przedmiotu. Przedstawiono wyniki badań własnych obejmujących wpływ nauki w klasach wojskowych na postrzeganie Sił Zbrojnych RP oraz zaprezentowano wnioski i rekomendacje. Problem badawczy niniejszego artykułu stanowiło pytanie: Jak uczniowie klas wojskowych postrzegają

obecny wizerunek Sił Zbrojnych RP? Celem pracy była analiza obecnie stosowanych działań kształtujących wizerunek Sił Zbrojnych RP w opinii uczniów klas wojskowych.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE Siły Zbrojne RP, wizerunek, klasy mundurowe, bezpieczeństwo militarne, obronność

Biographical note

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Conflict of interests

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Author contributions

The author contributed to the interpretation of results and writing of the paper. The author read and approved the final manuscript.

Ethical statement

The research complies with all national and international ethical requirements.