

Life Skills Acquired in Relation to Teaching Methods Used Through Swimming Context

Manal M. Bayyat¹, Samira M. Orabi² & Mohammad H. Abu Altaieb³

¹ Department of Management and Coaching, Faculty of Physical Education, The University of Jordan, Jordan

² Department of Health and Recreation, Faculty of Physical Education, The University of Jordan, Jordan

³ Department of Supervision and Teaching, Faculty of Physical Education, The University of Jordan, Jordan

Correspondence: Manal Bayyat, Faculty of Physical Education, University of Jordan, Amman, Jordan. Tel: 962-79-035-4435. E-mail: mabayyat@yahoo.com

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Abstract

This study aims: (1) to examine life skills acquired by students attending different levels of swimming courses. (2) To investigate the relation between teaching/learning methods used by swimming teachers and the level of life skills acquired. The population of this study were students who attended one of the three levels of the swimming courses in the Faculty of Physical Education /University of Jordan (n= 236). The sample of the study consisted of 142 students. Both “Life skills through swimming context scale” and “Teaching/ Learning methods in swimming context scale” were used to collect the required data. The data was analyzed using descriptive and statistical analysis. Results showed that the sample acquired the life skills through swimming context on a high level scale. Students believed that communication and self-confidence/self-esteem were the most important skills acquired (86%), followed by teamwork (85%), decision-making/responsibility (84%) and problem-solving (80%). There was a significant relation between life skills acquired and the teaching/ learning methodologies used including brainstorming, demonstration and guided practice, small groups, games and situation analysis. Therefore swimming context using the efficient participatory teaching methods proved to have a positive effect on life skills and youth development.

Keywords: life skills, sports, swimming context, teaching methodologies, youth development

1. Introduction

The World Health Organization’s (WHO) defines life skills as the abilities for adaptive and positive behavior that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life and for the future. The nature and definition of life skills may vary according to differences in cultures and settings (World Health Organization, 2003). Life skills are considered as psychosocial competences that can be physical, behavioral, or cognitive (Papacharisis, Goudas, Danish, & Theodorakis, 2005).

According to Danish (1996) these life skills are considered important for individuals to succeed in different environments such as school, home, neighborhood, and community. For adolescents to acquire life skills, these must be concrete, easily taught, easily learned, and transferable. The WHO has identified five basic areas of life skills: decision-making and problem-solving, creative thinking and critical thinking, effective communication and interpersonal relationship skills, self-awareness and empathy and coping with emotions and stress (UNICEF, 2012; World Health Organization, 2003).

Other global organizations such as the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) have built on the WHO efforts in life skills. UNICEF, for example, has worked on emerging life skills in education and came up with the life skills-based education concept. The Children's fund emphasized that life skills can be learned through education settings and highlighted the importance of the context in which life skills are presented. Life skills were summed up in three broad categories of ‘generic life skills; cognitive skills – critical thinking and problem solving skills for responsible decision making, personal skills – skills for awareness and drive and for self – management and interpersonal skills – skills for communication, negotiation, cooperation and teamwork, and for inclusion, empathy and advocacy (UNICEF, 2012).

Different interventions have been developed by researchers to help adolescents learn to achieve a positive future.

Such interventions focus on teaching important life skills. Programs and interventions that are interactive have stronger effects than those that are information based (Forneris, Danish, & Scott, 2007).

Researchers have studied the effect of life skills intervention on a person's actions. They found that such life skills tend mainly to change a person's actions towards himself and towards others (UNICEF, 2012). Eventually, life skills will improve the surrounding environment to make it more supportive and conducive (Holt, Tink, Mandigo, & Fox, 2008; World Health Organization, 2003).

One such life skills intervention is the Going for the Goal (GOAL). Those who participated in GOAL reported that they had learned how to set goals, solve problems effectively, and seek the appropriate type of social support (Forneris et al., 2007). In his research Mehr (2011) found that self-esteem and adjustment had a positive effect on improving the psychological health of people.

Sport psychologists consider sports as a vehicle for healthy development (Holt et al., 2008). Sports more likely have a positive effect on participants under specific conditions (Super, Hermens, Verkooijen, & Koelen, 2014). Life skills can be taught in combination with athletic skills in sport contexts (Danish, 1996). The outcomes of sport-related physical activity can be framed as differential 'capitals' that represent investments in domain-specific assets: emotional, financial, individual, intellectual, physical, and social (Bailey, Hillman, Arent & Petitpas, 2013). Thus, promoting sport participation might be a good way to increase life prospects.

Researchers have studied sport as a context for positive youth development. They reported the development of numerous positive characteristics in individuals such as increased self-awareness, goal setting, time management, emotional regulation skills, positive peer relationships, leadership skills, initiative, personal and social responsibility, and self-esteem (Gordon & Doyle, 2015; Mehr, 2011; Ullrich-French & McDonough, 2013).

Sport teachers and coaches are regarded as the most influential individuals in facilitating life skills' outcomes such as fair play, respect for others, cooperating and decision-making in learners. In addition, the values and philosophies that coaches hold impact on the values and life skills that learners learn from participating in sporting activities (Fourie & Surujlal, 2011). Building skills and changing attitudes may work best by implementing participatory teaching methods. Role play, demonstration and guided practice, case studies, small group work, class discussion, brainstorming, games, situation analysis are some examples of the participatory teaching methods, and are all considered to be influential teaching methods (World Health Organization, 2003).

In seeking to advance the literature in youth development/sport area, the authors have decided to study life skills acquired through a sport context. While there is a lot of life skills research in the sport field, few of them have addressed swimming as a context in an educational setting. Thus, swimming was chosen as the base sport of this study.

The Faculty of Physical Education at the University of Jordan offers swimming courses to all students enrolled in the Physical Education program. Three swimming course levels are offered each academic semester: basic, intermediate and advanced. Both basic and intermediate swimming courses are obligatory for all students. The advanced course, on the other hand, is optional and more challenging. All levels have their own expected outcomes. By the end of the three swimming course students are expected to learn swimming skills such as floating, standing in the water, front and back crawl, butterfly stroke, breaststroke and dolphin kick, in addition to essential life-saving techniques. Students are expected to be committed to learning and practicing swimming skills. They spend approximately 48-60 hours/semester learning and training their swimming skills and techniques under their teachers' supervision.

Danish et al. (2005) suggested that researchers must establish "what sport can teach, how it can be taught, and where it best can be taught" (p. 48). Based on these questions, the authors identified the aims of this study as follows: (1) to examine life skills acquired by students attending different levels of swimming courses at the Faculty of Physical Education/University of Jordan, (2) to investigate the relation between the teaching/learning methods used by swimming teachers and the level of life skills acquired.

2. Method

2.1 Participants

The population of this study were students who attended one of the three levels of the swimming courses in the Faculty of Physical Education in the University of Jordan (n= 236). The sample of the study consisted of 142 students (60.1% of the population) distributed as described in Table 1. They attended the swimming classes one hour/three days a week for four months.

Table 1. Swimming courses students' population and sample distributed by course level

Course Level	Population (N)	Sample (N)
Basic	125	59
Intermediate	80	59
Advanced	31	24
Total	236	142

2.2 Instrumentation

2.2.1 Scales Construction and Validation

The authors needed valid and reliable scales in order to assess the acquisition of life skills in the swimming context for undergraduate students, and to study the relation between teaching/learning methods and life skills acquired during the swimming courses. A long process of reviewing similar and related literature took place in order to find the most suitable. No adequate scales were found to match the aims of the study. Thus, it was necessary to construct new scales.

Based on the literature review and relying on the authors' relevant experiences, primary versions of two scales were constructed. The first scale aimed to identify acquired life skills through swimming courses, in which the authors chose to examine some specific life skills based on the influential WHO and UNICEF life skills list. The scale consisted of 65 items targeting 8 life skills. The second scale aimed to ask the students to identify the different participatory teaching/learning methods used by the teachers of the swimming courses. It consisted of 11 different participatory teaching/learning methods.

The two primary versions were presented to three experts in the field in order to validate their contents in relation to relevancy to the swimming context and clarity of items.

In light of the experts feedback, necessary modifications were made and the final versions of both scales were ready.

2.2.1.1 "Life Skills through Swimming Context Scale":

The scale (see Appendix A) consisted of two parts. The first part included information about the swimming course level. The second part included 42 items reflecting five life skills which experts agreed to be the most appropriate and feasible to fulfill the aim of this study. Johnston, Harwood & Minniti, (2013) identified these skills as follows: (1) Communication: one's ability to express oneself verbally and non-verbally, expressing feelings, giving and receiving feedback without blaming. (2) Teamwork: one's ability to work with and help others and contribute to the group, generally towards achieving a general goal. (3) Confidence/ self –Esteem: one's overall general belief in self and one's ability. (4) Problem solving: enables us to deal constructively with problems of our lives. (5) Decision-making/Responsibility: helps us to deal constructively with decisions of our lives.

Students were asked to circle the level of life skills they think they acquired through their swimming context. A five-level Likert for frequency was used to assess each item: always (5), often (4), sometimes (3), rarely (2) and never (1),

The scale's reliability coefficient has been calculated through measuring the internal consistency for each factor using the Cronbach's Alpha. Table 2 shows good levels of reliability with a total number of 0.88.

Table 2. Reliability coefficient of "Life skills through swimming context scale"

Cronbach's Alpha	Dimensions
0.85*	Communication
0.84*	Teamwork
0.83*	Confidence/ Self –Esteem
0.78*	Problem Solving
0.89*	Decision-making/Responsibility
0.88*	Total

Note: * indicates significance level at $p < 0.05$

2.2.1.2 "Teaching/ Learning Methods in Swimming Context Scale":

The scale (see Appendix B) consisted of seven teaching/learning participatory methods that may be used in the sport context in general and in the swimming context in particular. These methods were identified by The World Health Organization (2003) as follows: (1) Class discussion: the class discusses a skill to reach a better understanding or develop new ideas and directions for the students, (2) Brainstorming: students generate a broad variety of ideas about a certain skill, (3) Demonstration and guided practice: a student or a teacher presents a demonstration of the skill, (4) Role Play: informal acting of a situation, (5) Small groups: the class is divided into groups to work on a certain skill, (6) Games: students play games to learn a skill, (7) Situation analysis: students think about, analyze and discuss situations to better understand the content.

Students were asked to check the box that reflects the teaching method their swimming teachers were using during the swimming courses they attended. A three-level Likert for frequency was used to assess each item: always (3), sometimes (2) and never (1).

The scale's reliability coefficient has been calculated through measuring the internal consistency for each factor using the Cronbach's Alpha. Table 3 shows good levels of reliability with a total number of 0.82.

Table 3. Reliability coefficient of "Teaching/learning methods in swimming context scale"

Cronbach's Alpha	Teaching / Learning method
0.89*	Class discussion
0.77*	Brainstorming
0.79*	Demonstration and guided practice
0.84*	Role Play
0.89*	Small groups
0.83*	Games
0.79*	Situation analysis
0.82*	Total

Note: * indicates significance level at $p < 0.05$

2.3 Data Collection

Data was collected from the study sample at the end of the academic semester which ran from September 2015 to January 2016. Research ethics approvals and permissions were obtained. Both "Life skills through swimming context scale" and "Teaching/learning methods in swimming context scale" were distributed to the sample of the study ($n=142$) by the second and third author. The students were assured that their contribution was totally voluntary, all data were strictly confidential and would be used only for scientific research purposes. They were asked not to write their names on the questionnaires. They were instructed to carefully read the items, check the answer that mostly corresponds to them and to answer all items.

2.4 Statistical Analysis

In order to obtain a complete image of the study results, data statistical analysis included: descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, percentages) to identify the nature of acquisition of life skills among the students of the swimming courses, Pearson correlation to examine the relation between life skills acquired and the teaching/learning methods used by the teachers, as well as the Internal consistency of the scales using Cronbach's coefficient alpha. Data was processed by SPSS 14.

3. Results

3.1 Life Skills Acquired during Swimming Courses

Table 4 shows that the sample of this study acquired all five life skills through attending their swimming classes on a high level scale. Students believed that communication and self-confidence/self-esteem were the most important skills learnt through the swimming context (86%) followed by teamwork (85%), decision-making/responsibility (84%) and problem-solving (80%).

Table 4. Means, SD, percentages of importance, level of acquisition and ranking of life skills of students through swimming courses

Ranking	Level	Percentages	SD	Mean	Dimensions
1	High	86%	0.51	4.3	Communication
3	High	85%	0.59	4.26	Teamwork
2	High	86%	0.56	4.28	Self Confidence/self esteem
5	High	80%	0.59	4	Problem Solving
4	High	84%	0.63	4.24	Decision-making/responsibility
	High	83%	0.55	4.21	Total

3.2 The Relation between the Acquisition of the Life Skills and the Teaching/ Learning Method Used by Teachers

Table 5 shows that there was significant relation between Life skills acquired and some of the teaching/Learning methods used by teachers such as brainstorming, demonstration and guided practice, small groups, games, situation analysis. Yet no significant relation occurred between life skills acquisition and the class discussion method or role playing method.

Table 5. Relation between life skills and teaching/ learning methods

	CD	BS	DGP	RP	SG	G	SA
Communication	0.03	0.4*	0.5*	0.01	0.5*	0.8*	0.6*
Teamwork	0.04	0.51*	0.6*	0.02	0.65*	0.6*	0.5*
Self Confidence	0.02	0.61*	0.47*	0.2	0.45*	0.4*	0.7*
Problem Solving	0.09	0.54*	0.42*	0.3	0.43*	0.66*	0.56*
Decision-making	0.1	0.62*	0.6*	0.25	0.64*	0.74*	0.64*
Total	0.05	0.74*	0.7*	0.1	0.7*	0.71*	0.54*

Note: * indicates significance level at $p < 0.05$

CD = Class discussion, BS = Brainstorming, DGP = Demonstration and guided practice, RP = Role play, SG = Small groups, G = Games, SA = Situation analysis

4. Discussion

The results of this study show a high level of life skills acquired through participating in swimming context. The study gave clear evidence that attending the different levels of swimming courses has a positive impact on promoting important life skills such as communication skills, teamwork, self-confidence, problem solving and decision-making. These results correspond to research by Harrist & Witt (2012) who indicated that the context of the activity contributes significantly to the outcomes of participation. Mehr (2011) also claimed that swim training and exercise can provide an appropriate ground for demonstrating abilities and competence, and may enhance self-esteem.

Waldron (2009) has identified several life skills including communication, problem solving, health maintenance, and identity development, which emerged through participating in the Girls on Track (GOT) program, while Weiss, Stuntz, Bhalla, Bolter & Price (2013) have found that the First Tee program had a positive impact on promoting youth development in the golf context and in the transfer of life skills to other domains. Furthermore, children who received an intervention of the modified version of Sports United to Promote Education and Recreation (SUPER) showed higher goal setting, problem solving, positive thinking, and sport skills (Papacharisis et al., 2005).

A positive significant relation occurred between life skills acquired by the students and some of the teaching/learning methods used by their teachers. In this study teachers were an effective part of the teaching/learning process of life skills. They used the appropriate active participatory teaching and learning methods such as brainstorming, demonstration and guided practice, small groups, games and situation analysis. These findings were similar to those of Harrist & Witt (2012). Alcalá, Pueyo, & Jimenez (2015) also agreed that

by implementing an attitudinal methodology in a stunt unit in a Physical Education class, it will directly influence the perception of students about responsibility.

The brainstorming method encouraged students to dig deep into their selves, find different answers, choose the best alternative. Holt et al. (2008) has found that teachers involve their students in decision making and problem solving through brainstorming, class discussion and group work. They declared that teachers' philosophy supported the development of such skills. These teaching/learning methods are the most effective methods for developing knowledge, attitudes, and skills together for students to make healthy choices.

Sport can provide an educational context for acquiring life skills but highlight that interactions with key social agents (peers, parents and coaches) are crucial components of how people learn life skills through their involvement in sport. In particular, peer interactions appeared to be the most meaningful aspects of youth sport participation (Holt, Tamminen, Tink, & Black, 2009).

Although teachers did not employ the teaching methods to deliberately develop life skills, it is rather a byproduct of such teaching methods, taking into account the clearly structured context to develop such skills (Fourie & Surujlal, 2011; Gould, Collins, Lauer, & Chung, 2007).

Teachers encouraged peer interaction during the small group work method and the situational analysis method. These experiences provided youth with opportunities to bridge individual differences. In their research Watkins, Larson, & Sullivan (2007) have reported that students learned about teamwork through their involvement in the team.

Teachers understood the importance of contextual elements related to swimming. They provided quality experiences while using the demonstration and guided practice, which eventually promoted life skills development. In accordance Holt et al. (2008) discussed the US sport-based life skills intervention program Teaching Personal and Social Responsibility (TPSR). This model was developed to instruct teachers and coaches on how to teach certain life skills through sport and other types of physical activities. The teachers were able to boost participants' perceptions of themselves (self-confidence), to promote cooperation and enable participants to get to know each other (teamwork), as well as to enhance self-esteem and to promote listening and communication skills (UNICEF, 2012). Swimming teachers were able to teach their students by modeling and demonstration which are powerful means of transmitting knowledge and values (Bandura, 1986).

The results of this study showed no significant relation between life skills acquisition and the class discussion method or the role playing method. These results contradict with the results of Holt, McHugh, Tink, Kingsley, Coppola, Neely, & McDonald (2013) who indicated that role play, simulations and case studies created challenges to students in the swimming context which engaged their imaginations and helped the students learn swimming and life skills.

5. Conclusions

Findings of this study emphasized the idea that students acquire high levels of life skills through attending swimming courses. Also students acknowledged some of the teaching methods their swimming teachers were using during their swimming classes. Findings also stressed that using the suitable teaching/learning methodologies can provide an educational context for the acquisition of life skills. We hope that such findings might foster the use of such participatory teaching methods.

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Appendix A

Life skills through swimming context scale

Please circle the appropriate response which is most descriptive of you

Item	Life skill	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
1	I listen carefully to the technical explanation of the skills.					
2	I focus during listening to the teacher's instructions.					
3	I interpret the non- verbal signals of the teacher during practice.					
4	I show suitable reactions during swimming practice.					
5	I am good at following instructions.					
6	I avoid pre-judging performance.					
7	I use verbal and non- verbal communication to interact with others.					
8	I communicate with others with confidence.					
9	I openly accept others' opinions.					
10	I negotiate with others to convince them with my point of view about the right performance of skills.					
11	I respect and accept others' ideas.					
12	I am a team player.					
13	I make sure to follow the teachers' instructions.					
14	Group interest is always the priority.					
15	I willingly help others.					
16	I make sure to enforce trust bonds between team members					
17	I endure training pressure along with my team.					
18	I can listen to others.					
19	I discover faults in the swimming performance which my colleagues fail to do.					
20	I present constructive criticism toward technical skill.					
21	I detect my strengths and weaknesses during my practice and find suitable solutions.					
22	I try to be creative during swimming.					
23	I can think out of the box.					
24	I give helpful and critical advices to others.					
25	I praise others and accept being praised easily.					
26	I positively criticize others and accept criticism.					
27	I swim with confidence.					
28	I feel enthusiastic when I learn new swimming skills.					
29	I have no problem of doing new skills.					
30	I am satisfied with the way I deal with others.					
31	I practice my swimming drills without supervision.					
32	I practice my swimming drills with all my effort.					
33	I am eager to learn.					
34	I organize my duties.					
35	I invest my time.					
36	I cooperate with my peers.					
37	I try to interact with those who are less active.					
38	I suggest different solutions to problems.					
39	I study my alternatives.					
40	I help others taking decisions.					
41	I choose the best alternative.					
42	I try to understand others.					

Appendix B

Teaching/ learning methods in swimming context scale

Dear student

Following are several participatory teaching/learning methods that are usually used in the sport context.

Please check to what extend do you think your swimming teacher is using any of these methodologies in the swimming courses you attend.

Teaching / Learning method	Always	Sometimes	Never
1 Class discussion (The class discuss a skill to reach to a better understanding or develop new ideas and directions for the students)			
2 Brainstorming (Students generate a broad variety of ideas about certain skill)			
3 Demonstration and guided practice (To present a demonstration of the skill by the student or the teacher)			
4 Role Play (informal acting of a situation)			
5 Small groups (class is divided into groups to work on a certain skill)			
6 Games (students play games to learn a skill)			
7 Situation analysis(to think, analyze and discuss situations to better understand the content)			

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