

Swimming Safety in a Special Education

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Abstract

Safe participation in swimming activities is essential for promoting the health, independence, and social inclusion of students with disabilities. This paper presents the implementation of a Safe Swimming program conducted at the swimming pool of the Special Education and Vocational Training School of Serres (EEEEK of Serres). The program aimed to develop water safety skills, familiarize students with essential safety rules, and enhance their confidence and independence in the aquatic environment. The intervention was based on individualized instruction tailored to each student's abilities and educational needs, through the collaborative efforts of teachers, special support staff, and qualified swimming instructors. The educational activities included safe entry and exit from the pool, water familiarization, basic floating and locomotion skills, and instruction in accident prevention and safe behavior in and around the water. The outcomes indicated significant improvements in students' adherence to water safety rules, their independence in the aquatic environment, and their positive attitudes toward swimming. Furthermore, the program strengthened interdisciplinary collaboration among teachers and support staff, contributing to the creation of a safe, inclusive, and supportive learning environment. In conclusion, structured safe swimming programs implemented in special education settings can play an important role in preventing water-related accidents while promoting motor development, social participation, self-confidence, and overall quality of life for students with disabilities.

Keywords: safe swimming, water safety, adapted physical education

1. Introduction

The participation of students with disabilities in structured physical education programs is a fundamental prerequisite for their holistic development and is associated with significant benefits for physical health, psychological well-being, and social inclusion. Adapted Physical Education aims to ensure equitable access to physical activity for all students by implementing appropriate modifications to the curriculum, instructional methods, and learning environment. Swimming is considered one of the most effective forms of physical activity for students with special educational needs, as the aquatic environment reduces the mechanical stress placed on the body, facilitates movement, and promotes the development of balance, coordination, muscular strength, and cardiorespiratory endurance. At the same time, the acquisition of fundamental water safety skills is of particular importance, as it contributes both to accident prevention and to the enhancement of students' independence. Within the context of special education, swimming instruction should be based on educational approaches that promote active participation, differentiated instruction, positive feedback, and experiential learning. The use of guided discovery, imitation, and self-assessment strategies creates a supportive learning environment in which students develop motor skills, strengthen their self-confidence, and cultivate social and emotional competencies. The purpose of the present study is to present a teaching scenario for the safe acquisition of fundamental swimming skills by female and male students attending a Special Vocational Education and Training School (E.E.E.E.K.). The proposed scenario is aligned with the current Physical Education Curriculum and is grounded in contemporary principles of Adapted Physical Education and inclusive education.

The purpose of the scenario is for the students to:

The purpose of this teaching scenario is for the students, with regard to:

The Motor Domain

- ✓ To develop both simple and complex motor skills.
- ✓ To enhance coordination of movement.
- ✓ To improve physical abilities, including agility, dexterity, speed, and endurance.
- ✓ To learn and practice head-first diving techniques.

The Moral - Emotional - Social Domain

- ✓ To develop self-discipline, determination, responsibility, patience, perseverance, and courage.
- ✓ To enhance self-esteem through the improvement of physical abilities, the acquisition of motor skills, and participation in adapted swimming activities.
- ✓ To build self-confidence through awareness of one's own abilities and limitations in relation to others, while fostering free and democratic self-expression.
- ✓ To reduce anxiety and tension, as students with special educational needs benefit from learning how to relax and focus on their goals.
- ✓ To create motivation for active and enthusiastic participation in physical activities.
- ✓ To strengthen body image and promote the development of a positive self-concept through physical activity.
- ✓ To develop adaptive behaviors and coping mechanisms that help students compensate for the motor and emotional challenges associated with their disabilities.
- ✓ To foster self-awareness and acceptance of their condition, as well as an understanding of the limitations imposed by their disability.
- ✓ To cultivate moral values and virtues such as honesty, fairness, respect for opponents, self-respect, modesty, sportsmanship, and healthy competition.

Cognitive Domain:

- ✓ Learning routines and basic rules for structuring the lesson and appropriate behaviour, as defined with the support of the Physical Education teacher, as well as simple rules for games and safety at school and in water environments.
- ✓ Understanding concepts and acquiring knowledge of elements related to the aquatic environment.
- ✓ Analyzing the importance of encouragement through positive feedback and the provision of assistance by the Physical Education teacher.

The Experiential / Behavioral Domain

- ✓ Application of principles of safe exercise, aiming at the development of health-related physical fitness.
- ✓ Utilization of available facilities and equipment.

2. Description of Teaching Practice

In this teaching script, the imitation method is applied (a learning method involving exemplary teaching through the use of demonstration and representation models). Additionally, the guided discovery method (an indirect teaching method) is utilized, which is effective for students with moderate cognitive abilities. The physical education teacher provides the student with a series of steps or questions that guide them in discovering movement. This teaching script also incorporates the cooperative teaching method and the flipped classroom model. The teaching style varies across different stages of the lesson. Specifically, at the beginning of the lesson, the guided discovery style is applied, as the physical education teacher poses probing questions to the students, helping them arrive at a solution to the problem while simultaneously fostering higher mental processes such as analysis, synthesis, etc., thereby ensuring their active participation. Next, the divergent production style is applied, allowing students to discover original solutions to the problem. Finally, the self-check style is implemented (criteria cards, self-assessment, and Tables 1 & 2).

Table 1. Self-assessment of students

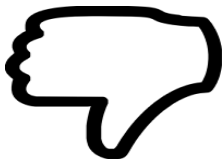
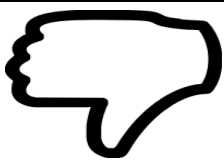
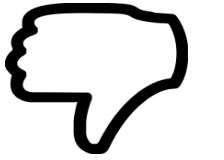
	YES	NO
Do I like water exercise?		
Are the rules easy?		
Were the exercise easy?		

Table 2. Evaluation of the learning teaching

	YES	NO
Were the exercise easy?		
Do I have a good time? /Did I enjoy it?		
Did the teacher help me?		

3. Conclusions

- The script could, with the appropriate modifications, be applied and to students with a diagnosis of autism.
- The present script could be implemented cross-curricularly in collaboration with the school's occupational therapist.
- A limitation of the present study is that the proposed swimming program may not be equally applicable to all students with disabilities, as individual abilities, needs and levels of swimming experience may vary (Graham et al.,2026)
- Future studies could examine the effectiveness of the program with larger and more diverse group of students with disabilities and over a longer period of time, in order to evaluate its impact on swimming skills and water safety (Graham et al.,2026; Kemp et al., 2024).

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Annex

Teaching Script: Identity

IDENTITY OF THE TEACHING SCENARIO

Title: Swimming Safety in a Special Education

Educational Level-Class: Inclusive instruction involving students from different classes of the Laboratory of Special Vocational Education and Training (E.E.E.EK.) of Serres.

Involved Cognitive Areas and Compject Areas:

Subject Area: Physical Education

Thematic Field: Motor Development

Thematic Unit: Alternative Forms of Exercise and Recreational Physical Activities

General Expected Learning Outcomes: Learning, Exploration, and Discovery

PREREQUISITE KNOWLEDGE AND DESIRED SKILLS

The students have previously been taught a wide range of motor skills and movement concepts related to locomotion in the aquatic environment. They have participated in breathing activities and have gained familiarity with basic water-based movement experiences. In addition, through their participation in previous grade levels, they have developed skills related to personal and social responsibility, including cooperation, adherence to rules, self-discipline, and respect for others.

ORGANIZATION OF TEACHING AND REQUIRED HARDWARE INFRASTRUCTURE

Class organization: The Physical Education teacher supports the students during each teaching session in order to help them achieve the specific learning objectives of the lesson, according to their individual abilities, without competition, in a safe environment.

- In the present scenario, the spectrum of teaching styles will be applied, including teacher-centred styles, self-directed learning initiatives and divergent production. This constitutes an active learning model with multiple benefits for the students, as they are actively involved in the learning process, interact and clarify the material (Boucher, Robertson, Wainner & Sanders, 2013).
- During the educational process, the Physical Education teacher supports, encourages, coordinates, and organises the students, who participate, think critically, analyse and synthesise concepts, and construct knowledge through cognitive processes. She encourages them to experiment, learn from their mistakes, and express their emotions, enriching their knowledge and motor experiences by following their own learning pace within an engaging and safe environment.

Educational Material

The swimming pool of the aquatic center will be utilized. The selected activities will be individual in nature. Supervisory Instruments: Projector, Computer, Loudspeaker, Power strip, Paper tapes

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE TEACHING PROCESS

Homework (40')

The teacher, in collaboration with the students' parents, sends a link containing a YouTube video titled "*Swimming pool educational program*" (YouTube–duration approximately 8'15''), which is related to safety rules in the swimming pool environment.

Teaching Hour

1st Activity (5')

The Physical Education teacher informs the students about the purpose of the lesson and then poses exploratory questions to the students in order to assess their understanding of the rules, based on the video they watched at home (Picture 1)



Picture 1. I'm checking that I made the signal correctly

2nd Activity (5')

The Physical Education teacher instructs the students to perform individually, in a parallel formation, forward steps with propulsion from the leading foot until they reach the opposite side, while the teacher remains positioned in front of the students. This is followed by an exercise involving lateral stepping and changes of direction, aimed at developing spatial orientation. The Physical Education teacher monitors the students' level of communication. If

any conflict, disagreement, or inappropriate behavior is observed, the activity is stopped and the teacher poses oral questions to the students regarding appropriate ways of communication and cooperation, including how to give and receive help. This discussion focuses on aspects such as voice intensity, body movements, verbal and non-verbal expressions used when addressing others, as well as demonstrating respect for the personality and individuality of peers.

3rd Activity (5')

The students, holding the lane divider, perform kicking movements in the freestyle style, and then, by changing to a supine position, they perform kicking movements in the backstroke style (Picture 2).



Picture 2

4th Activity (8')

Breathing exercises are carried out using equipment such as straws, whistles, and special foam materials. A breathing game titled "The Hidden Treasure" is also implemented (Picture 3).



Picture 3

5th Activity (7')

Relaxation exercises for the neck and trunk are performed on mats, as well as through guided body support provided by the Physical Education teacher.

6th Activity (5')

The students' effort is reinforced through positive feedback, followed by dives performed in any swimming style of their choice.



Picture 4

POSSIBLE EXTENSIONS -ADAPTATIONS OF THE TEACHING SCENARIO

- The scenario could also be implemented for students diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder.
- The present scenario could be implemented in a cross-curricular approach, in collaboration with the school's Physiotherapy and Occupational Therapy staff.

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