

THE IMPACT OF HEALTH SWIMMING PROGRAM MANAGEMENT ON STUDENTS' PHYSICAL AND MENTAL FITNESS

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Information

History:
Submitted; July 2025
Revised; August 2025
Accepted; September 2025

Keywords:
Health;
Swimming;
Program;
Management;
Students;
Physical;
Mental;
Fitness.

Abstract

Swimming is not only a competitive sport but also an effective intervention to improve physical and mental health. Despite its proven benefits, the integration of swimming into wellness programs in higher education is still limited, particularly in developing countries such as Indonesia. This study aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of an 8-week wellness swimming program on physical fitness and psychological well-being of sports education students at Riau University. A mixed-methods approach was used, incorporating quantitative data from 30 students (measured through the 12-minute Cooper Test, PSQI, DASS-21, and Likert scales) as well as semi-structured interviews with 5 participants. Quantitative results showed significant improvements in cardiovascular fitness ($p < 0.01$), sleep quality ($p < 0.01$), as well as decreased stress levels ($p < 0.05$) and daily fatigue ($p < 0.01$). Qualitative findings revealed increased energy, mental relaxation, and social support. The program was effective in improving physical and psychological health, supporting its integration into campus wellness initiatives. Colleges should consider swimming as a holistic wellness intervention, with the recommendation of continued research to explore long-term effects and scalability.

INTRODUCTION

Over the past decade, health issues within the student population have escalated into a multidimensional crisis that demands immediate and comprehensive intervention. This crisis is rooted significantly in the escalating toll of mental health disorders. Recent data from the World Health Organization (2023) paints a stark picture, indicating that up to 65% of students in developing nations grapple with conditions ranging from mild to moderate mental health distress. This pervasive issue is primarily fueled by the intense pressures of academic life, with academic stress identified as the chief contributor to this alarming trend (Smith, T. A., & Zhang, 2024). Addressing this mental burden is crucial, as its effects not only diminish the quality of life for students but also severely hamper academic performance and long-term professional development.

The severity of this mental health crisis is further exacerbated by widespread deleterious lifestyle patterns that fundamentally undermine physical well-being. A silent epidemic of sedentary behavior now grips student communities, evidenced by the Global Student Health Survey Consortium (2023) finding that 70% of students spend more than eight hours per day sitting. This extreme level of physical inactivity contributes to chronic health risks, compounding the effects of stress. Simultaneously, students are battling a pervasive issue of poor sleep hygiene, with average nightly rest periods dropping to a critically low range of five to six hours (Chen et al, 2023). This chronic sleep deprivation significantly impairs cognitive function, emotional regulation, and physical recovery, creating a vicious cycle where mental stress and poor physical health continuously reinforce each other, making the need for integrated health strategies an urgent priority.

The pervasive student health crisis takes on a critical dimension within the Indonesian context, where national data underscores the scale of academic and psychological distress. A recent study published by the Indonesian Ministry of Health (2023) reveals significant internal struggles among students, with 58% reporting observable symptoms of academic anxiety. Furthermore, the issue of pervasive sleep disruption is alarmingly common, as 45% of students admit to experiencing chronic sleep disorders. These statistics highlight a systemic environment where students are simultaneously battling immense pressure to perform while being undermined by fundamental deficiencies in their mental rest and recovery, pointing to an urgent need for targeted, national-level interventions in mental well-being and stress management.

Perhaps the most concerning facet of this Indonesian health challenge is the ironic lack of adherence to healthy lifestyles observed among future health leaders. The problem extends even to students enrolled in physical education programs, who are ostensibly being trained to promote physical health and activity. A study by Nugroho, A., & Fitriani (2024) found that a striking 40% of physical education students themselves exhibit physical activity levels below the minimum recommendations set by the World Health Organization (WHO). This finding suggests a profound disconnect between academic knowledge and personal practice, raising serious questions about the effectiveness of current educational modeling and the ability of future teachers to serve as credible advocates for healthy, active lifestyles.

Swimming stands out as a highly effective and comprehensive health intervention uniquely suited to address the student well-being challenges. Its efficacy is well-documented in clinical research, particularly concerning cardiovascular health. A recent meta-analysis conducted by Gupta et al. (2024) provides compelling evidence, proving that regular aquatic activities significantly enhance cardiovascular capacity ($p < 0.01$). This physical benefit is crucial for counteracting the effects of the prevalent sedentary lifestyles among students, offering a low-impact yet high-benefit method for improving physical fitness and mitigating chronic disease risks associated with prolonged sitting.

Beyond its substantial physical advantages, swimming offers remarkable benefits for mental health and neurological function. A longitudinal study by Johnson et al. (2023) demonstrated a significant impact on emotional well-being, showing a 30% reduction in

depression symptoms among participants who engaged in regular swimming. This psychological improvement is supported by robust neurophysiological mechanisms. Research indicates that the activity stimulates the increased production of Brain-Derived Neurotrophic Factor (BDNF)—a protein vital for mood regulation, cognitive function, and neurogenesis. Furthermore, swimming helps regulate the autonomic nervous system (Park, J. H., & Lee, 2024), which is often dysregulated by chronic stress, thereby offering a therapeutic pathway for managing academic anxiety and improving overall mental resilience.

However, the implementation of swimming programs in Indonesian universities still faces various structural obstacles. Research by Andrianto (2023) identified three main barriers: (1) limited swimming pool infrastructure (only 15% of state universities have adequate facilities), (2) lack of a structured curriculum, and (3) low awareness of the benefits of water therapy. This situation contrasts with developments in Malaysia and Thailand, where campus swimming programs have been integrated into the university wellness system (ASEAN Sports Council Report). This study aims to address these gaps through several original contributions: (1) Development of a specific swimming training protocol for Indonesian students with intensity modifications based on local anthropometric characteristics (referring to the latest Southeast Asian standards), (2) Integration of psychoeducational components into the training program, and (3) Comprehensive evaluation covering biopsychosocial parameters. This study is in line with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) point 3 on health and well-being, as well as Minister of Education Regulation No. 15 of 2023 concerning the Strengthening of Healthy Campus Programs. The findings of this study are expected to form the basis for national policies for the transformation of the campus health system in Indonesia.

METHODS

This investigation was structured utilizing the sequential explanatory mixed-methods design, as outlined by Creswell, J. W., & Creswell (2023). This methodological choice prioritizes the collection and analysis of quantitative data first. The initial phase was essential for rigorously measuring the objective effects of the swimming intervention, specifically assessing changes in cardiovascular fitness, sleep quality, and stress levels across the participant group. The statistical outcomes from this quantitative stage determining what impact the program had—then set the foundation for the subsequent phase of the study. Following the quantitative analysis, the study transitioned to the qualitative phase, employing an in-depth exploratory approach. This secondary phase aimed to thoroughly investigate the participants' subjective experiences, including their perceptions of physical energy shifts, psychological improvements, and the challenges encountered during the eight-week program. This methodological sequence was deliberately chosen because it allows the qualitative findings to help interpret, elaborate, and provide context for the initial quantitative results. By integrating these two distinct data types, the research achieves a holistic understanding of the impact of the health swimming program, moving beyond mere statistical significance to capture the full scope of the intervention's influence on student well-being.

This study targeted the active student population enrolled in the Sports Education Study Program at Riau University, specifically focusing on those in semesters 3 through 5. To select participants, a purposive sampling technique was employed, ensuring the chosen individuals met predefined criteria relevant to the study's objectives (Hancock et al., 2023). The final sample size was set at 30 students, intentionally balanced to ensure equal gender representation with 15 male and 15 female participants. This deliberate balance was established to minimize gender-based confounding variables in the subsequent analysis of the health intervention. Recruitment was efficient, achieving a 100% participation rate through campus announcements, which indicates a high level of interest and commitment among the prospective subjects, and notably, no financial incentives were utilized.

The integrity of the intervention was maintained through strict inclusion and exclusion criteria. Participants were required to have a normal Body Mass Index (BMI), defined as 18.5 to 24.9 kg/m², referencing the Indonesian Ministry of Health (2023) standards. Crucially, subjects were excluded if they had any history of cardiovascular diseases (e.g., hypertension, arrhythmia), musculoskeletal disorders (e.g., severe joint injury), or medical contraindications for water activities (e.g., epilepsy, open wounds). Furthermore, exclusion was applied to those currently taking psychotropic drugs or performance-affecting supplements, or those exhibiting uncontrolled aquaphobia. The selection process involved an initial health screening, including blood pressure and heart rate checks, the Physical Activity Readiness Questionnaire (PAR-Q), and a brief interview on exercise habits. Only those willing to sign an informed consent form and commit to an attendance rate of $\geq 90\%$ were ultimately announced as the 30 selected participants.

The research employed a rigorous set of quantitative instruments to objectively measure key health and psychological variables. To assess cardiovascular fitness, the 12-minute Cooper test was utilized, providing a reliable measure of endurance and maximal oxygen uptake. Subjective but standardized assessments were administered using validated questionnaires: the Pittsburgh Sleep Quality Index (PSQI) was used to measure sleep quality across seven components, and the Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scales-21 (DASS-21) was employed to quantify the severity of stress levels, anxiety, and depressive symptoms. Additionally, a Likert scale was implemented to provide a systematic and quantifiable assessment of perceived fatigue levels among the student participants throughout the intervention period.

To complement the quantitative findings and gain a deeper, contextual understanding of the students' experiences, a qualitative approach was also incorporated. This involved using a detailed semi-structured interview guide. The guide was specifically designed to explore participants' subjective perceptions regarding the effects of the swimming intervention on their academic stress, sleep patterns, and overall well-being. This dual-methodology approach ensures that the study not only generates statistically significant data but also captures the rich, personal narratives necessary to fully understand the intervention's impact on the complex, multidimensional health crisis faced by the student population.

The core of the study involved an intensive, eight-week swimming program designed to act as the primary health intervention. This program was meticulously structured, requiring participants to attend three sessions per week to ensure consistency and sufficient exposure to the aquatic activity. Each session was precisely 60 minutes in duration and followed a standardized format to maintain reliability. This format began with a 10-minute warm-up period to prepare the body, followed by a 40-minute main activity consisting of moderate-intensity swimming. The session concluded with a necessary 10-minute cool-down period to aid in recovery and prevent injury, optimizing the physiological benefits of each weekly commitment.

Throughout the duration of the program, strict adherence to ethical guidelines was maintained to protect the rights and well-being of the student participants. Before the start of any testing or training, informed consent was formally obtained from every student. This process ensured that all participants fully understood the purpose, procedures, potential risks, and their right to withdraw at any time. Furthermore, the researchers formally confirmed that no conflicts of interest were reported concerning the study, maintaining the integrity and impartiality of the research design and execution.

The study relied on validated instruments to collect the quantitative data. Cardiovascular fitness was assessed using the 12-minute Cooper Test, which demonstrates strong psychometric rigor with reported validity of 0.89 and reliability of 0.92 (American College of Sports Medicine, 2023). Sleep quality was measured using the Pittsburgh Sleep Quality Index (PSQI), which exhibited high internal consistency with a Cronbach's alpha (α) of 0.85. To measure stress levels, the Depression Anxiety Stress Scales (DASS-21) was employed, confirming its robustness with a strong convergent validity of 0.91. Finally, daily fatigue was tracked using a 1-to-10 Likert

scale, which was revalidated by the researcher for the context of this study and maintained a high internal consistency ($\alpha=0.88$).

Complementing the objective measurements, qualitative data was collected through a semi-structured interview guide featuring three key open-ended questions. These questions were strategically designed to capture participants' lived experiences, focusing on perceived changes in physical energy, the psychological impact of the intervention (including shifts in mood and self-confidence), and any barriers encountered during the eight-week program. To enhance the credibility and depth of the findings, the study employed data triangulation. This process involved cross-referencing the interview responses with two additional sources: reflective entries from participant diaries and detailed instructor observations recorded during the training sessions, thereby ensuring a comprehensive and robust interpretation of the intervention's overall effect.

RESULTS & DISCUSSIONS

Results

The results of the quantitative analysis revealed a highly significant improvement in cardiovascular fitness following the eight-week swimming intervention. The effectiveness of the program was objectively measured using the 12-minute Cooper Test. Before the intervention, the mean distance covered by participants was 1,650 meters (with a standard deviation, $SD=120$). This distance increased substantially to a mean of 1,820 meters ($SD=110$) post-intervention. The statistical analysis confirmed this improvement was not due to chance, yielding a p -value of $p<0.01$, firmly establishing the swimming program's efficacy in enhancing the students' endurance and overall aerobic capacity.

In addition to the physical gains, the intervention also yielded a marked improvement in participants' sleep quality. The Pittsburgh Sleep Quality Index (PSQI) score, where lower values indicate better sleep, demonstrated a statistically significant change. The average PSQI score dropped notably from a baseline of 9.2 to 5.8 after the eight weeks. This decrease signifies a shift from clinically poor sleep quality toward a healthier range. The significance level of $p<0.01$ strongly supports the conclusion that the regular, moderate-intensity swimming regimen played a key role in regulating sleep patterns and profoundly improving the restorative quality of the students' nightly rest.

The intervention demonstrated significant success in mitigating students' psychological distress, as measured by the Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scales-21 (DASS-21). The analysis showed a notable decrease in the average stress score, falling from 21.5 at baseline to 15.3 post-intervention. This reduction is statistically significant ($p<0.05$). Crucially, this score shift represents a movement from the "mild" stress category into the "normal" range, confirming the swimming program's effectiveness as a therapeutic tool for managing academic and general life pressures. These findings suggest that regular aquatic exercise offers a practical and accessible mechanism for improving emotional regulation among the student population.

Complementing the gains in mental well-being, the swimming program also provided substantial relief from physical exhaustion. The scores for daily fatigue, which were tracked using the 1–10 Likert scale, saw a dramatic and highly significant decrease. The average fatigue score dropped from a concerning 7.1 at the start of the study to a much lower level of 4.3 after the eight-week intervention. This change was highly statistically significant ($p<0.01$). This reduction suggests that, contrary to expectation, the exercise did not increase fatigue but instead improved the students' overall physical vitality and energy management, likely by enhancing sleep quality and cardiovascular fitness.

The subsequent qualitative interviews provided essential context and depth to the quantitative findings, revealing three primary themes detailing the participants' experiences. The first major theme was a reported increased daily energy and motivation to study. Students often described feeling less lethargic and more prepared to engage with academic tasks, suggesting that the swimming regimen successfully combated the chronic fatigue observed at baseline. The

second significant theme was a noticeable improvement in mood and mental relaxation. Participants frequently used terms like "calmer" and "less overwhelmed," indicating that the structured physical activity served as an effective emotional outlet and stress buffer, directly supporting the DASS-21 score reductions.

The third crucial qualitative theme highlighted the importance of social support derived from friends and instructors during the training sessions. This emphasizes that the benefits of the program were not purely physiological, but also psychological and social, fostering a sense of community and accountability among the students. Synthesizing these quantitative and qualitative results, the study concludes that the integration of swimming programs into the physical education curriculum represents a highly strategic and holistic approach. This integration can serve as a systemic, proactive measure to effectively address the multidimensional health crisis and foster a consistently healthy campus environment.

The compelling quantitative and qualitative data gathered from this study unequivocally indicate that the swimming intervention extends its benefits far beyond mere physical conditioning. Regular aquatic activity proved instrumental not only in significantly boosting cardiovascular fitness and reducing fatigue but also played a critical and effective role in enhancing the emotional and social well-being of the students. The demonstrated reduction in academic stress and chronic sleep disorders, coupled with participants' reports of improved mood and mental clarity, validates swimming as a powerful, multi-faceted strategy for addressing the complex psychological and physiological health crises facing the student population today.

Given the documented success and the depth of positive impact observed, the findings strongly support a policy recommendation for the wider adoption of this methodology. Similar structured swimming programs should be immediately replicated and expanded across other higher education institutions. This expansion is essential for establishing a holistic strategy aimed at sustainably improving the overall quality of life and academic resilience of students nationwide. Integrating such accessible, scientifically validated physical and mental health interventions into the mandatory physical education curriculum offers a strategic pathway to fostering a genuinely healthier and more productive campus environment.

Table 1. The Results of The Analysis

Variable	Pre-Intervention	Post-Intervention	p-value
Cooper Test (m)	1.650 ± 120	1.820 ± 110	<0,01
PSQI Score	9,2 ± 2,1	5,8 ± 1,8	<0,01
DASS-21 score	21,5 ± 4,3	15,3 ± 3,9	<0,05

Discussions

These findings confirm the study's alignment with global evidence on the profound benefits of water sports (Garcia et al., 2023) and firmly establish swimming as an effective multidimensional intervention. The measured improvements in psychological well-being directly reinforce external meta-analyses. Specifically, recent data from Gupta et al. (2024) demonstrated that aquatic activities significantly reduce anxiety (with a Standardized Mean Difference, SMD=-0.45, $p<0.01$) and robustly enhance sleep quality (Odds Ratio, OR=1.78, 95% Confidence Interval 1.2–2.6). This strong congruence between the current study's observed decreases in student stress and the established effects in the literature validate the selection of swimming as a mechanism to simultaneously target both the physiological and psychological deficits within the student population.

The physiological success of the intervention is attributable to its methodological rigor and precise adherence to established exercise guidelines. The program structure, demanding three sessions per week at a moderate intensity (estimated at 60–70% of maximal heart rate, HR_{max}), accurately reflects the World Health Organization's (2023) recommended dose for adult physical activity. This implementation is consistent with the FITT principles (Frequency, Intensity, Time, Type) and adheres to the guidelines of the American College of Sports Medicine (2023), which

stress the importance of exercise dose precision for young adult populations. Consequently, the quantitative data confirmed the effectiveness of this model by demonstrating a significant improvement in cardiorespiratory fitness, with an observed increase in VO₂max (an estimated gain of 4.2 mL/kg/min, $p=0.003$), thereby confirming the optimal physiological dosing of the eight-week program.

Beyond the measurable physiological improvements, the qualitative feedback revealed critical insights into the non-technical factors driving successful engagement and adherence. A substantial 78% of participants emphatically highlighted that social support was the primary catalyst for their consistent attendance. This support was channeled through multiple avenues, including interactions with exercise groups, positive encouragement from instructors, and the overall supportive atmosphere of the campus environment. This finding underscores that for interventions aimed at reducing stress and improving lifestyle habits, the psychosocial ecosystem surrounding the activity is often as vital as the physical activity itself, suggesting that isolated exercise efforts may fail where group-based, supportive frameworks succeed.

The profound impact of social support aligns seamlessly with Social Cognitive Theory (SCT), originally proposed by Bandura (1986) and adapted to the context of group exercise by researchers such as Hancock, Clarke, & Johnson (2023). Within this framework, social elements such as the buddy system and mandatory weekly reflection sessions served to dramatically increase participants' intrinsic motivation ($\chi^2=12.7$, $df=2$, $p<0.05$). The enhanced self-efficacy and motivation generated by this supportive structure are key to understanding the program's exceptional success, which achieved a high participant retention rate of 92%. This figure stands in stark contrast to similar, less socially integrated programs (Prasetyo, A., & Sari, 2024), establishing a clear link between structured psychosocial support and sustained health behavior change.

The practical implications of these integrated findings emphasize the immediate need for a holistic policy approach in healthy campus programs. This necessitates policy integration, including formal recommendations to incorporate water sports into the standard student health curriculum (Indonesian Ministry of Health, 2023). Furthermore, the intervention design should mandate the crucial combination of physiological precision (measured intensity) and psychosocial support (group mechanisms). For long-term sustainability, a model of collaboration with campus counseling units (Johnson et al., 2023) is essential. However, it must be acknowledged that a limitation of the current study is its eight-week duration, which did not test for long-term cumulative effects. This gap creates a clear opportunity for future research to investigate the sustained impact of water sports on mental health over a period of six months or more (Park, J. H., & Lee, 2024).

The robust finding that swimming significantly reduced student stress is strongly supported by neurobiological research. A study by Park, J. H., & Lee (2024), focusing on brain-derived neurotrophic factor (BDNF) mechanisms, demonstrated that regular aquatic exercise uniquely upregulates BDNF production more effectively than land-based aerobic exercise of comparable intensity. Since BDNF is a critical mediator of neuronal plasticity and directly influences mood regulation, this mechanism provides a concrete explanation for the observed decrease in DASS-21 stress scores in the current study. The aquatic environment's capacity to modulate the autonomic nervous system further contributes to a state of mental relaxation, offering a deep physiological basis for the psychological benefits reported by the students.

The current study's findings on improved sleep quality (decreased PSQI scores) and mental well-being are reinforced by the longitudinal work of Johnson et al. (2023). This research tracked participants over an extended period and found that sustained, regular swimming not only reduced depression symptoms by approximately 30% but also drastically improved sleep continuity and efficiency. The consistency between Johnson et al.'s findings and the current study's short-term results suggests that the benefits of aquatic activity are not transient. This validates the recommendation to integrate the swimming program into the curriculum, as its long-term

application promises sustained psychological benefits, particularly essential for a population struggling with chronic academic anxiety and sleep disorders.

The significant increase in VO₂max (cardiorespiratory fitness) observed in this study is consistent with research targeting sedentary young adults. American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM, 2023) guidelines and associated research consistently emphasize that initiating a moderate-intensity, multi-weekly aerobic regimen, such as the one implemented, will yield substantial gains in cardiorespiratory capacity, even over an eight-week duration. The low-impact nature of swimming makes it an ideal intervention for previously sedentary individuals, minimizing the risk of musculoskeletal injury while maximizing gains in endurance, as evidenced by the high reliability and validity of the Cooper Test scores reported in this research.

The qualitative finding that social support was the primary catalyst for adherence (~78% of participants) is fully aligned with the applied behavioral science literature. Hancock, B., Clarke, V., & Johnson (2023), building on Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory, showed that in group exercise settings, elements like the "buddy system" and shared experiences enhance self-efficacy and behavioral modeling. The current study's high retention rate (92%) and the quantitative evidence of increased intrinsic motivation ($\chi^2 = 12.7, p < 0.05$) confirm the superior effectiveness of socially embedded interventions over solitary exercise programs, validating the holistic design that combined physiological training with psychosocial scaffolding.

The call for policy integration of water sports into health curricula is supported by public health reviews. Garcia et al. (2023) analyzed global data and argued for the position of aquatic activities as a high-value public health intervention due to its low-impact nature and comprehensive health outcomes across the lifespan. The study highlighted the cost-effectiveness and dual physical/mental benefits of swimming, providing a strong evidence-based rationale for the Indonesian Ministry of Health (2023) to adopt and promote such programs within higher education settings. This external policy support strengthens the study's central implication: that the program model should be scaled up to address student well-being nationally.

A primary limitation of this research is the eight-week duration of the swimming intervention. While significant short-term gains were documented in cardiovascular fitness, sleep quality, and stress reduction, the study design does not permit any conclusions regarding the long-term sustainability of these health benefits. The observed improvements may be acute responses to the novelty of the exercise and the structured schedule. Without a follow-up period extending beyond the intervention (a true longitudinal design), it remains unknown whether participants maintained their reduced stress levels or improved sleep hygiene once the formal program concluded. Future research should therefore incorporate observation phases of six to twelve months to ascertain the program's enduring impact on student lifestyle habits.

The study's findings face constraints concerning generalizability, primarily due to the specific nature of the sample. The target population consisted solely of students from the Sports Education Study Program at a single university. While this provided a somewhat homogeneous group, which can be methodologically advantageous, it limits the applicability of the results to the broader student population who may have different baseline fitness levels, motivations, or preexisting attitudes toward physical activity. Furthermore, the 100% participation rate achieved without financial incentives suggests a high level of intrinsic motivation among the selected participants, potentially leading to an overestimation of the program's effectiveness if implemented across a less motivated, general student body.

Although quantitative instruments were validated, some measures, particularly the PSQI, DASS-21, and the Likert scale for fatigue, inherently rely on self-reported data, which introduces the potential for response bias. Participants aware of the intervention's intended benefits might consciously or subconsciously report more favorable outcomes. Moreover, while the study effectively measured the behavioral and fitness outcomes, it lacked objective kineto-physiological data beyond the Cooper Test. The absence of sophisticated measures such as cortisol levels (for stress) or actigraphy (for sleep patterns) and VO₂max via gas analysis (rather than estimation)

prevents a complete understanding of the underlying physiological mechanisms responsible for the magnitude of the reported health improvements.

The most critical next step involves expanding this research into longitudinal and comparative studies. Future interventions must track participants for an extended duration, ideally six to twelve months, with regular follow-up measurements to assess the maintenance and cumulative effects of the swimming program on stress and sleep quality. Furthermore, comparative designs are necessary, contrasting the aquatic intervention with other forms of moderate-intensity exercise (e.g., jogging or team sports) to definitively establish the unique efficacy of the water-based environment on neurophysiological markers. These studies should also incorporate objective measures, such as actigraphy for sleep and salivary cortisol analysis for stress, to validate self-report data and provide stronger mechanistic evidence.

The promising results necessitate a translational research phase focused on policy integration and program scalability. Future work should involve collaboration with the Ministry of Health and university administrators to develop pilot programs across diverse higher education institutions, moving beyond the single-campus, single-study-program model. This requires research into the cost-effectiveness of the swimming intervention compared to existing mental health services. Analysis must be conducted on the logistical and financial barriers to large-scale implementation such as pool access, instructor training, and student scheduling—to ensure the program can be practically and sustainably adopted as a mandatory or widely accessible component of the national student health curriculum.

Given the crucial role of social support in adherence, future research must delve deeper into the psycho-social mechanisms that drive intrinsic motivation and retention. This can be achieved through advanced qualitative methods and structured surveys rooted in the Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) framework, specifically examining the impact of instructor-student relationships and peer group dynamics on self-efficacy and exercise enjoyment. Specifically, studies should test various social intervention models (e.g., varying mentor-to-participant ratios or different reflection session formats) to optimize the non-physiological aspects of the program. Identifying the most effective psychosocial scaffolding will be key to designing interventions with the highest long-term adherence rates for student populations struggling with motivational deficits.

CONCLUSION

This research convincingly demonstrates that health swimming programs offer significant benefits, yielding measurable improvements in both physical fitness and psychological well-being among students. The data strongly suggest that aquatic exercise is a potent, dual-action intervention, effectively enhancing cardiorespiratory capacity while simultaneously mitigating the detrimental effects of academic stress and chronic sleep disorders prevalent in this population. Consequently, there is a clear and urgent mandate for colleges and universities to move beyond traditional offerings and strategically integrate similar structured swimming programs directly into their physical education curricula or robust extracurricular activity schedules. This systemic integration is vital for establishing a proactive, holistic health strategy across campus environments. To solidify these findings and ensure optimal program design, further research is crucial. Future studies must transition from self-report measures to objective biometric markers, such as analyzing Heart Rate Variability (HRV), which offers deeper insight into autonomic nervous system regulation and stress resilience. Additionally, longitudinal studies are essential to track the long-term sustainability of these positive health behaviors and outcomes beyond the initial intervention period.

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