

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Reasons Parents Sign Up Their Children for Swimming Lessons in Ghana

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ABSTRACT

Background: Swimming is recognized as a vital life skill with significant physical, emotional and developmental benefits for children. However, parental motivations for enrolling children in swimming lessons, particularly in Ghana, remain underexplored. This study investigates the primary motivations of Ghanaian parents and guardians for enrolling their children in swimming lessons, focusing on health, skill development, social influences and safety awareness.

Methods: An explanatory sequential mixed method design was employed by combining quantitative and qualitative data. The study unfolded in two distinct phases: First, 300 parents completed questionnaires about swimming enrollment motivations. Then, 20 interviews explained the quantitative findings, revealing both trends and underlying reasons. Participants included professionals and relatives of children aged 4–10 years.

Results: Quantitative data revealed that health-related motivations dominated, with 86.2% of parents citing health benefits, 89.6% disease prevention and 94.8% confidence-building as key reasons. Medical recommendations strongly influenced decisions (73.6%). However, only 9.1% recognized skill acquisition as a motivation, and 67.7% were uncertain. Qualitative findings highlighted gaps in water safety knowledge, with parents relying on pool guards for safety guidance. Social influence had mixed effects (43.8% agreement and 48.1% uncertainty). Interviews underscored swimming's role in motor development, social-emotional growth and weight management.

Conclusion: Although Ghanaian parents prioritize health and medical advice when enrolling children in swimming, awareness of skill development and drowning prevention remains limited. The study underscores the need for targeted educational campaigns to highlight swimming's holistic benefits and safety measures. Collaborative efforts between swimming institutions and health professionals could enhance parental understanding and participation.

1 | Introduction

Swimming is an essential life skill that has gained increasing recognition among Ghanaian parents as a valuable activity for their children. Traditionally, swimming was not a mainstream sport in Ghana, as many communities lacked proper swimming facilities, and there was a general fear of swimming accidents (Boadu et al. 2021). However, with growing awareness of swimming safety, health benefits and the importance of early

childhood skill development, more parents are enrolling their children in swimming lessons (Osei and Nyarko 2022).

Swimming is not only a popular recreational activity in the world but also a vital life skill that can significantly impact an individual's health and well-being. The benefits of swimming are well documented and include improved cardiovascular health, enhanced muscle strength and better coordination and flexibility (Zhen and Palumbo 2018). Additionally, swimming

Summary

- There is a need for targeted awareness programmes to educate parents about the full range of swimming benefits.
- Structured water safety education should be mandated in swimming lessons.
- Policies should encourage collaboration between health providers and swimming institutions to promote swimming as a preventive health measure, especially for conditions like obesity and autism.
- Personal experiences and community influence significantly drive enrollment.
- Swimming programmes should emphasize social-emotional benefits and competitive opportunities.

is often recommended for its mental health benefits, such as stress reduction and improved mood (Parker and Smith 2019; Ekkekakis 2013). Given these advantages, it is essential to understand the motivations behind parents' quest to enroll their children in swimming lessons, particularly in different cultural contexts.

In Ghana, a country with a rich cultural heritage and a growing emphasis on physical fitness, understanding parental motivations for enrolling children in swimming lessons is crucial. Swimming enhances physical fitness, aids in weight management and reduces the risk of chronic diseases such as obesity and diabetes (Khambalia and Seen 2015). It provides children with essential life-saving skills, boosts confidence and supports overall physical and cognitive development. Medical professionals recommend swimming as a safe and effective exercise, even for children with health conditions (Penedo and Dahn 2005; Agyemang and Owusu-Dabo 2018).

Additionally, swimming is a valuable life skill that enhances water safety and confidence in aquatic environments (Lang and Tremblay 2017). It is also viewed as a competitive skill, offering opportunities for scholarships and professional sports careers. Beyond physical benefits, swimming fosters socialization and emotional development. Lessons allow children to build friendships, teamwork skills and a sense of belonging (Ulrich-French and Smith 2006; Weiss and Stuntz 2004; Moran and Willcox 2016), contributing to their overall well-being (Malina 2010).

Previous research indicates that parental decisions regarding children's sports participation are influenced by various factors, including health benefits, skill acquisition, socialization opportunities and recommendations from healthcare professionals (Pharr et al. 2014; Garcia et al. 2016; Wang and Sheu 2015). These factors reflect broader societal values and the perceived importance of swimming as a life skill.

Scholars have discussed several significant functions and features of swimming lessons that should be considered while organizing swimming lessons specialized for preschool children (Moran and Stanley 2006; Mistry 2013; Turdaliyevich and Pulatovna 2020; Gross 2021).

Previous literature also highlighted the benefits of swimming for children (Howells and Jarman 2016; Stubbs and Cumming 2017; Willcox-Pidgeon et al. 2021; Mancheno 2024).

Research has been conducted to examine parental perceptions, supervision and role on children's swimming ability and preschool swimming lessons (Moran and Stanley 2006; Morrongiello et al. 2013; Morrongiello et al. 2014; Farizan et al. 2020; Rajeh et al. 2023).

However, there is scant literature on the reasons why parents sign up their children for swimming lessons. This study aims to explore the various reasons parents in Ghana sign up their children for swimming lessons, providing insights into the benefits of swimming to the child. In Ghana, where noncommunicable diseases such as obesity and diabetes are on the rise, understanding the motivations for enrolling children in physical activities like swimming can help public health officials design targeted interventions to promote physical activity and preventive health measures. By identifying the factors that encourage or discourage parents from enrolling their children in swimming lessons, policymakers can develop strategies to increase participation in this beneficial activity, thereby improving overall public health outcomes.

Also, by researching the reasons behind parents' decisions to sign up their children for swimming lessons, educators and sports programme developers can highlight these developmental benefits in their outreach efforts, thereby encouraging more parents to consider swimming lessons for their children. This, in turn, supports holistic child development and aligns with the educational goals of fostering well-rounded individuals. The insights gained from this research can drive the development of targeted, culturally appropriate and effective programmes that promote the widespread adoption of swimming lessons, ultimately contributing to the well-being and development of Ghanaian children. The findings will inform the development of targeted interventions and programmes to promote swimming and enhance child development, health and safety in Ghana.

2 | Benefits of Swimming to Children

Swimming is an excellent activity for children, offering numerous physical, mental and social benefits (Sonni 2023). Swimming is a multifaceted exercise that offers extensive physical health benefits. It is a robust aerobic activity that improves the efficiency of the heart and lungs (Tsolaki et al. 2023). Regular participation increases the oxygen supply to the muscles, enhancing overall cardiovascular health (Susnara and Curtner-Smith 2023). Swimming helps to maintain healthy blood pressure levels and reduce the risk of cardiovascular diseases, such as heart attack and stroke (Biró et al. 2020). The continuous nature of swimming helps maintain an elevated heart rate, which strengthens the heart muscle over time. This endurance training leads to a more efficient cardiovascular system (Zhang and Liu 2024).

Swimming builds muscle strength and endurance, enhances flexibility and coordination and is gentle on the joints (Crowley et al. 2017). Swimming involves the coordinated use of various muscle groups, including the core, back, arms and legs. This

widespread engagement ensures balanced muscle development and increased strength. The natural resistance of water adds an extra level of difficulty, which helps in toning muscles and building strength without the need for additional weights (Aspenes and Karlsen 2012). Swimming requires continuous movement, which builds muscular endurance. Over time, this leads to increased stamina and the ability to perform prolonged physical activities without fatigue. Swimming promotes flexibility due to the extensive range of motion required for different strokes (Guo et al. 2022). This regular stretching and movement can prevent stiffness and improve overall joint health. Enhanced flexibility reduces the risk of injuries during other physical activities by ensuring that muscles and joints are more pliable (Tanaka and Swensen 1998). Swimming requires the synchronization of arm and leg movements with breathing, which enhances overall coordination and motor skills. The need to navigate through water and maintain proper form improves spatial awareness and body control.

Additionally, swimming aids in weight management and boosts metabolism, contributing to overall health and well-being (Petridou et al. 2019). Encouraging regular swimming can be a key component of a healthy lifestyle, providing both immediate and long-term health benefits. The buoyancy of water supports the body and reduces the impact on joints, making swimming an ideal exercise for individuals with arthritis or other joint issues. Because it is gentle on the joints, swimming can be sustained over a lifetime, providing long-term health benefits. Swimming is commonly used in rehabilitation settings to help individuals recover from injuries (Willoughby et al. 2018). The low-impact nature allows for gentle strengthening and increased mobility without exacerbating injuries. Swimming is an efficient way to burn calories, contributing to weight loss and maintenance (Murase et al. 2006). The intensity can be varied to match fitness goals, making it versatile for different individuals. By engaging in multiple muscle groups, swimming ensures a high caloric expenditure while also building muscle mass. Regular swimming sessions can boost metabolism, aiding in the efficient use of energy and the burning of fat (Omar et al. 2021). This can help regulate appetite and support healthy body weight.

Improved metabolism results in higher energy levels, enhancing overall physical activity and daily functioning. Although not a weight-bearing exercise, swimming can help maintain bone density when combined with other activities that stress the bones (Bruininks et al. 2019). For children and adolescents, swimming can contribute to the development of strong bones, which are crucial for preventing osteoporosis later in life (Khaledi et al. 2023).

In today's fast-paced world, stress has become a ubiquitous part of daily life, affecting individuals across all age groups and professions. As people search for effective ways to manage and alleviate stress, swimming has emerged as a highly beneficial activity. Swimming is a full-body workout that engages almost every muscle group, providing comprehensive exercise that enhances physical health (Zhang and Liu 2024). The act of swimming involves rhythmic movements and controlled breathing, which can help reduce physical tension and promote relaxation. Physical exercise, including swimming, triggers the release of endorphins, the body's natural 'feel-good' hormones (Köroglu

and Yigiter 2016). These endorphins help reduce the perception of pain and trigger positive feelings. The buoyancy of water supports the body, reducing the impact on joints and muscles (Berger and Owen 1988). This gentle resistance and support can lead to muscle relaxation and decreased physical tension, which are often byproducts of stress. Regular swimming can help regulate sleep patterns. Better sleep is crucial for stress management, as it allows the body and mind to recover and rejuvenate (Ansari et al. 2021).

Swimming is not just beneficial for physical health; it also has profound effects on mental well-being. The immersive nature of swimming creates a unique environment for mental relaxation and stress relief (Pearson et al. 2020). Swimming requires concentration on breathing, stroke techniques and movement. This focus can act as a form of meditation, drawing attention away from stressors and promoting a state of mindfulness (Yadolahzadeh 2020). Being fully present in the moment helps break the cycle of negative thoughts and anxiety. The repetitive and rhythmic nature of swimming can have a calming effect on the mind (Adnan et al. 2019). The sound of water and the sensation of moving through it can be soothing, reducing feelings of stress and anxiety. Studies have shown that regular physical activity, including swimming, can reduce symptoms of anxiety and depression (Chen et al. 2015). The combination of physical exertion and the calming property of water creates a powerful tool for improving mental health.

Swimming also offers social benefits that can contribute to stress relief (Moffatt 2017). Engaging in swimming activities can foster social connections and provide a sense of community. Joining a swimming club, taking swimming lessons or participating in group swim sessions can provide opportunities for social interaction. Building relationships and connecting with others can reduce feelings of loneliness and isolation, which are often linked to stress. Being part of a swimming community can create a support network where individuals encourage and motivate each other. This sense of belonging and mutual support can be a significant buffer against stress. Swimming can be a family activity, allowing for quality time and strengthening family bonds (Stubbs and Cumming 2017). Positive social interactions with family members can enhance emotional well-being and reduce stress levels.

Swimming is a valuable skill that can greatly benefit children throughout their lives. By promoting physical health, mental well-being and social skills and by ensuring safety through proper education and supervision, parents can help their children enjoy themselves and thrive in the water.

3 | Research Design and Methodology

This study employed an explanatory sequential mixed methods design to comprehensively investigate why Ghanaian parents enrol their children in swimming lessons. The research unfolded in two distinct phases: quantitative phase (first phase) and the qualitative phase (second phase). During the first quantitative phase, a structured questionnaire was administered to 300 parents/guardians to collect numerical data on motivations for enrolling children in swimming. Descriptive statistics (mean,

median, mode and percentages) were used to analyse trends, revealing that health benefits, disease prevention and confidence building were primary motivators. However, uncertainty was noted in areas like skill development and social influence, prompting further exploration. The qualitative phase was used to explain and expand on the quantitative findings; 20 in-depth interviews were conducted with parents/guardians. The quantitative phase identified broad trends, whereas the qualitative phase explored the 'why' behind them.

The study targets parents and guardians of children aged 4–10 years who are currently enrolled in swimming lessons in various regions of Ghana. The age range ensures that the study captures a broad spectrum of parental motivations across different stages of childhood development. A multistage sampling method was used to select participants. In the first stage, swimming pools and clubs across major towns in Ghana were identified. In the second stage, a stratified random sampling technique was employed to ensure representation from different socioeconomic backgrounds, regions and types of swimming programmes. Three hundred participants were sampled for the quantitative data, whereas 20 participants were purposively sampled for the qualitative data.

A structured questionnaire was developed based on existing literature and the focus of the study. The questionnaire included demographic information and Likert-scale items assessing various reasons for enrolling children in swimming lessons. The questionnaire was pilot tested with a small sample ($n = 30$) of parents and guardians who have enrolled their children in swimming lessons, to ensure clarity, reliability and validity. Necessary revisions were made based on feedback. The final questionnaire was distributed both online (Google Forms) and in person at swimming pools to maximize response rates. Consent forms were obtained from all participants. For the quantitative analysis, descriptive statistics were employed. Frequencies, means, mode, median, dispersion and shape of distribution were calculated to describe the demographic characteristics and overall trends in parental motivations.

The researcher employed semistructured interviews for qualitative data. In-depth interviews were conducted with a purposive sample of 20 parents and guardians to gain deeper insights into their motivations and experiences. The criteria for the selection of participants for the interview were based on equal gender representation and parents who have had their children enrolled in swimming lessons for 2 years or more.

Interview guides were developed to cover key themes such as knowledge of safety and drowning prevention, physical health and fitness, skill development, social and emotional development and personal experience and background.

The transcribed data from interviews were analysed using thematic analysis. Initial codes were generated, and themes were identified, reviewed and defined. Data from different qualitative sources were triangulated to enhance the validity of the findings.

Participants were fully informed about the purpose of the study, their rights and how their data will be used. Written consent

will be obtained. Participant anonymity was maintained by assigning unique codes to each respondent and ensuring that no identifying information is disclosed.

4 | Data Analysis

This study adopts a comprehensive perspective on integrating data methods by employing an explanatory sequential design in data analysis. In this approach, the study starts with quantitative data collection and analysis, followed by qualitative research to explain or expand on the quantitative findings (Toyon 2021). Using explanatory sequential design in research writing involves clearly structuring the study into two phases: quantitative first, followed by qualitative. After analysis, results from both methods are compared, merged or interpreted together to find similarities, differences or complementary insights.

Explanatory sequential design was chosen for this study because it allows for a structured, two-phase approach where quantitative data are collected and analysed first, followed by qualitative data to explain the findings.

The researchers utilized the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) for the quantitative analysis. Survey data were coded, entered and analysed using SPSS Version 20. This software facilitated the creation of statistical charts to interpret responses as percentages. The data were input into SPSS, which then checked for errors, missing values and outliers, organizing the information in a format suitable for analysis. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize key features of the data, including measures of central tendency (mean, median and mode) and measures of variability (standard deviation and kurtosis). The analysis made use of a number of statistical methods, including percentages, mean, median, mode, standard deviation, skewness and kurtosis. Bar charts made it easier to visualize the data distribution by enabling a graphical representation of it. Furthermore, tables were employed to provide a concise overview of every element inside the dataset, facilitating thorough comprehension and examination. The scale used is as follows: *agree* = 1, *not sure* = 2 and *do not agree* = 3.

For the qualitative analysis, the researchers followed the six-phase thematic analysis process as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2012). Thematic analysis is used to identify, analyse and report patterns (themes) within data. The thematic analysis process helps ensure the robustness and credibility of the analysis. The six phases are familiarizing yourself with the data, coding the data, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report.

The analysis explored respondents' reasons for enrolling their children in swimming lessons. Following thematic analysis, the recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim. Researchers then repeatedly read the transcriptions to familiarize themselves with the content, highlighting key notes and phrases while jotting down initial thoughts.

Coding was done manually, starting with systematically identifying and labelling meaningful data segments. Each segment was given a descriptive label (code) that captured its essence. New

insights and perspectives were also considered during this process. The initial codes were then organized into potential themes by identifying patterns, similarities and connections among them. Related codes were grouped to form preliminary themes.

These preliminary themes were refined and reviewed for accuracy, clarity and relevance. Each theme's coherence and consistency were considered. The themes were clearly defined with concise and descriptive names that captured their essence, arranged logically and showed their relationships. The narratives of each theme are presented in the study's findings.

5 | Results

In responding to the study question, which aimed to investigate the different motivations Ghanaian parents and guardians give for enrolling their children in swimming lessons, a 3-point Likert scale was used to create a series of subquestions about the motivations for learning to swim in order to elicit feedback.

The respondents were made up of 72.2% females and 27.8% males, which comprise 51.3% mothers, 25.2% fathers, 15.1% aunts and 8.4% grandparents. The professional background of parents and guardians is 29.3% lawyers, 23.2% medical practitioners, 9.1% from academia, 32.2% entrepreneurs and 6.2% engineers. The ages of the enrolled children are 4 years (12%), 5 years (11%), 6 years (14%), 7 years (16%), 8 years (14%), 9 years (17%) and 10 years (16%). The enrolled children are made up of 57.2% males and 42.8% females.

In responding to the question of learning new skills through swimming, 9.1% of the respondents agreed with the statement that they signed up their children to learn new skills through swimming, 67.7% were not sure and 23.2% disagreed. A significant majority of parents are uncertain about the importance of learning new skills in swimming, suggesting a need for increased awareness of this benefit.

The data indicated that swimming lessons were medically recommended to 73.6% of the respondents, whereas 26.4% of the respondents did not receive any recommendation for swimming lessons. Medical recommendations are a strong motivator for a substantial proportion of parents, indicating trust in medical advice.

Also, the data show that 86.2% of parents enrolled their children for swimming lessons because they want them to be healthy, 6.1% of them were not sure and 7.7% of them disagreed.

The results show that 43.8% of the respondents enrolled their children for swimming due to social influence, whereas 48.1% of the respondents were not sure, and 8.1% responded negatively. Social influence has a moderate impact, with nearly half of the parents being uncertain, suggesting a mixed perception of its importance.

The data indicate that 94.8% of the respondents enrolled their children in swimming because they want their children to gain confidence, 5.2% were not sure and none of the respondents had any negative response.

The data show that 61.4% of the respondents enrolled their children for swimming to improve the motor development of their children, whereas 25.3% of them were not sure, and 13.3% of them stated the negative. Motor development is acknowledged by many parents, but a significant portion remains unsure, indicating an area for further education.

The data indicated that 89.6% of the respondents signed up their children for swimming in order to reduce the risk of diseases, whereas 10.4% were not sure of the statement, and none of them refuted the statement.

Again, the results show that 76.3% of the respondents enrolled their children in swimming lessons in order to help the children control their weight, whereas 21.7% were not sure of the statement.

5.1 | Knowledge of Safety and Drowning Prevention

Knowing the hazards connected to water and how to reduce them can save lives and avert catastrophic events. A mother who has enrolled her 9-year-old daughter in swimming lessons admitted that.

I rely on the pool guards for directions since I have little knowledge about water safety and drowning prevention.

Drowning is a leading cause of accidental death worldwide, particularly among children. Understanding and implementing water safety measures is essential to reduce these risks.

5.2 | Physical Health and Fitness Reasons

Swimming lessons provide numerous advantages that greatly support physical health and fitness. In responding to the question on the health and fitness benefits of swimming, a 70-year-old guardian who has enrolled his 10-year-old boy in swimming lessons for the past 3 years, remarked that.

Swimming is a highly effective way to burn calories and manage weight.

Swimming lessons are a great kind of exercise for people of all ages because they offer a variety of physical health and fitness benefits. Swimming provides a complete workout that promotes total health, from cardiovascular health and muscular strength to flexibility and mental clarity. Regular swimming instruction can result in a more active, healthy lifestyle that enhances physical fitness and overall wellbeing over the long run.

5.3 | Skill Development

Learning to swim effectively involves mastering various techniques and developing multiple skills, each contributing to overall swimming proficiency and safety. A 64-year-old grandfather

and a medical practitioner, who happens to escort her granddaughter to swimming lessons, stated that.

Swimming is a comprehensive activity that improves the coordination, strength, endurance, flexibility, agility, and reaction time of the child.

Developing motor abilities through swimming not only enhances swimming proficiency but also contributes to overall physical development.

5.4 | Social and Emotional Development

Participation in swimming lessons and team activities can foster a range of social skills and emotional growth. A father, who has an 8-year-old son in swimming lessons, shared his experience and stated that.

Being part of a swimming team teaches children about teamwork, cooperation, and the importance of working together towards common goals.

Swimming significantly contributes to social and emotional development by building confidence, fostering social interaction, promoting emotional regulation, instilling discipline and developing resilience. Through regular participation in swimming lessons and team activities, individuals, especially children, can gain valuable life skills that extend beyond the pool.

5.5 | Personal Experience and Background

Early exposure, cultural background, education and training, personal interests and motivation, health and physical abilities, psychological factors and social influences all contribute to how one experiences and engages with swimming. Participants have had varied experiences and backgrounds in swimming. These experiences have invariably influenced the decision to enrol their children in swimming lessons. A mother recounted how swimming has helped improve the outlook of her neighbour's autistic child, which consequently led her to enrol her 10-year-old daughter.

I was encouraged by the outlook and physical appearance of my neighbour's nine-year-old autistic child who has been going for swimming lessons for almost two years now.

Individuals with a higher level of baseline fitness may find it easier to engage in swimming and improve their skills. Swimming is often recommended for those with physical limitations or injuries due to its low-impact nature, making it accessible to a wider range of individuals.

6 | Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Findings

The integration of quantitative and qualitative data reveals a complex matrix of motivations among Ghanaian parents and

guardians for enrolling their children in swimming lessons, including health and fitness, medical reasons, confidence building and motor skill development.

Whereas the quantitative data reveal limited parental recognition of swimming as a skill-building activity, qualitative responses paint a richer picture. Parents and guardians described noticeable improvements in their children's coordination, strength, agility and even focus, underscoring swimming's vital role in enhancing both motor and cognitive development.

Medical recommendations play a crucial role in parental decisions, aligning with strong survey support. Medical endorsements emerged as a strong external motivator, with 73.6% of parents indicating that they had enrolled their children based on professional health advice. This finding illustrates the weight parents place on medical opinion in shaping decisions around extracurricular physical activity.

Parents widely acknowledge health and confidence-building benefits, corroborated by qualitative testimonies. Health benefits strongly motivated parents to enroll their children in swimming. Many believed it aids weight control (76.3%) and disease prevention (89.6%). A highly significant motivation was the desire to build children's confidence. An overwhelming 94.8% of respondents identified this as a reason for enrolling their children, and none disagreed.

A lack of awareness regarding drowning prevention suggests the need for educational interventions. Water safety emerged strongly in qualitative responses. One mother admitted relying on pool guards due to limited knowledge of drowning prevention. This underscores the urgent need for structured education on water hazards, especially as drowning remains a leading cause of accidental child deaths globally.

Social influences have a mixed impact, with qualitative data suggesting benefits in teamwork and cooperation despite uncertainty in quantitative responses. Social influence had a moderate impact, with 43.8% citing it as a motivator. Interviews highlighted emotional and social benefits. One father noted swimming teaches teamwork and cooperation. Overall, swimming was seen as more than exercise; it fosters discipline, emotional growth and valuable social skills in children.

7 | Discussion

The data reveal that 51.3% of the respondents are mothers, followed by 25.2% fathers, 15.1% aunts and 8.4% grandparents. This indicates that mothers play the most significant role in deciding to enroll children in swimming lessons, aligning with previous research suggesting that mothers are more likely to be involved in children's extracurricular activities (Rodriguez et al. 2018).

The professional backgrounds of the parents indicate a dominance of highly educated individuals: 29.3% lawyers, 23.2% medical practitioners, 9.1% academia, 32.2% entrepreneurs and 6.2% engineers. This suggests that swimming may be perceived as a

beneficial activity by well-educated individuals who are likely aware of its health and developmental advantages. According to Hornby and Lafaele (2011), parental education level strongly influences children's participation in extracurricular activities.

The primary motivators for parents enrolling their children in swimming lessons are health-related, with 86.2% of parents prioritizing their child's health and 89.6% citing disease prevention as a major reason. This aligns with studies by Stubbs and Cumming (2017) and Lee and Oh (2015), which highlight the cardiovascular and muscular benefits of swimming. A 70-year-old guardian's remark that swimming is an effective way to manage weight aligns with findings by Sinclair and Roscoe (2023) that swimming promotes overall well-being and weight management.

Additionally, 76.3% of parents believe swimming helps with weight control, reinforcing the idea that swimming is seen as a preventative health measure against childhood obesity a growing concern in many countries, including Ghana (Amugsi et al. 2020).

The data show that 94.8% of parents recognize confidence-building as a key reason for swimming. Swimming has been widely associated with improved self-confidence and emotional well-being in children (Sinclair and Roscoe 2023). A father's statement about teamwork and cooperation in swimming reflects research by Weiss (2019), which suggests that sports participation fosters social skills and teamwork.

However, social influence (43.8%) had moderate support, with 48.1% of parents uncertain about its impact. This suggests that although some parents enroll their children due to peer influence, the majority may not prioritize it. This contradicts previous studies that found social influences, such as peer participation, to be strong motivators in youth sports (Côté et al. 2007).

A significant 73.6% of parents stated that they were recommended to enrol their children in swimming lessons, supporting the idea that medical professionals play a crucial role in promoting swimming. This aligns with studies by Hammond et al. (2019), which found that health professionals often advocate for swimming due to its therapeutic benefits, particularly for children with conditions like autism, asthma or motor impairments. A mother's account of enrolling her daughter after seeing positive effects on her neighbour's autistic child reflects this perspective.

Despite swimming being an important life skill, only 9.1% of parents explicitly cited skill acquisition as a reason for enrolling their child, whereas 67.7% were uncertain. This suggests a gap in awareness about the developmental benefits of swimming, as research by der Merwe and Petrus (2022) highlights that swimming enhances coordination, endurance and motor skills.

That said, 61.4% of parents acknowledged motor development as a reason, though 25.3% were unsure. This indicates that although some parents recognize swimming's benefits for motor skills, others may not fully understand its impact, emphasizing the need for education on early childhood motor development through swimming.

The importance of water safety and drowning prevention was emphasized in interviews, with one mother admitting she relies on pool guards because she lacks knowledge of water safety. According to Golob et al. (2013), water safety education is critical in preventing drowning, which remains a major global concern. This finding suggests that although parents recognize swimming's health benefits, they may lack awareness of safety measures, reinforcing the need for structured water safety education in Ghanaian swimming programmes.

The qualitative data indicate that personal experiences significantly impact the decision to enroll children in swimming lessons. For example, a mother enrolled her daughter after seeing positive changes in a neighbour's autistic child. Research by Hammond et al. (2019) supports this, stating that personal exposure to the benefits of swimming increases parental willingness to enroll their children. This underscores the importance of community influence and personal networks in driving participation in swimming lessons.

The findings reveal that health (86.2%) and disease prevention (89.6%) are the strongest motivators, whereas building confidence (94.8%) is also a major factor. Medical recommendations (73.6%) and weight control (76.3%) play a significant role, but social influence (43.8%) has mixed responses, and many parents (67.7%) are uncertain about skill development.

The study highlights the need for increased awareness of the full benefits of swimming, especially in skill acquisition, motor development and water safety education. Given the high level of parental uncertainty about certain benefits, swimming institutions and health professionals in Ghana could do more to educate parents about the lifelong advantages of swimming for children.

8 | Conclusion

Most parents agree that they register their children for swimming lessons primarily due to health reasons, which include improving motor development, energy levels, confidence and reducing the risk of disease. This reflects a strong belief in the physical and mental advantages of swimming.

The other motivations are not as certain including making friends, excitement, standing out, preparing for competitions, winning scholarships or making their child special. This shows that although these could be motivating factors for some parents, they are generally not seen as the main reasons for enrolling children in swimming classes.

Parents have a generally positive perception of swimming, hence believing that it improves the well-being of children's health condition and self-control while boosting confidence. These attitudes show an extensively held view on the overall benefits of swimming beyond just its results in physical fitness alone.

Many parents are not sure about whether swimming helps in anger management. It shows a lack of knowledge or awareness among parents concerning how swimming can contribute to emotional control. Similarly, uncertainties exist regarding motivations related to social factors (e.g., making friends and

standing out), competitive aspects (e.g., preparing for competitions and winning scholarships) and perceptions of uniqueness (e.g., making a child special).

The findings suggest a need for targeted education and awareness programmes aimed at informing parents about the diverse benefits of swimming, including its role in emotional and social development. Programme developers and swimming coaches can use these insights to tailor their offerings to better align with parental motivations and perceptions, thereby enhancing engagement and satisfaction among parents and children.

Author Contributions

Austin Wontepaga Luguterah developed the concept and design of the study. From material preparation, data collection and analysis were performed by Austin Wontepaga Luguterah.

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Ethics Statement

Ethical approval in this study was reviewed and approved on 6 November 2023, by the Research Ethics Committee of University of Ghana with reference (ECH 131/22-23), which complies with the Declaration of Helsinki and the Belmont Report. All participants were provided with detailed information about the study and agreed to sign the informed consent forms. The informed consent of all participants was obtained for the study. Participant identities were anonymized, and all data were securely stored.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

Data Availability Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available at <https://data.qdr.syr.edu/dataset.xhtml?persistentId=doi:10.5064/F6YND0C2>.

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Appendix

Questionnaire

Reasons Parents Sign Up Their Children for Swimming Lessons in Ghana

The Department of Physical Education and Sport Studies, University of Ghana, Legon, is conducting a study on 'reasons parents sign up their children for swimming lessons in Ghana'. Swimming helps improve strength and flexibility, which results in superior balance and coordination. This survey is expected to provide researchers with relevant data to help coaches, teachers and other stakeholders across the country to provide better training to children. This study poses no risk to you or your child. You are also free to quit from the study at any time without consequence. We do, however, encourage you to fill out the questionnaire. This questionnaire is for academic purposes, and the respondents' confidentiality and anonymity are guaranteed.

Section A

Kindly answer the following:

1. What is your gender: Male.....Female.....
2. What is your profession:
3. What is the age of the child you enrolled for swimming:
4. What is the gender of the child you enrolled for swimming: Male..... Female.....
5. What is your relationship with the child?

Section B

Why do you sign up your child for swimming lessons?

Directions: tick (✓) all statements that apply to your situation.

	Agree	Not sure	Do not agree
I want my child to learn new skills in swimming			
It is the recommendation of the medical doctor			
I want my child to be healthy			
To improve the motor development of my child			
Swimming makes the child to gain confidence			
I want my child to reduce risk of disease			
To help control the weight of my child			

Interview Guide

Purpose

Thank you for agreeing to speak with me today. This interview is part of a study exploring parents' motivations, expectations and observations regarding their children's participation in swimming. Your insights will help us better understand how swimming impacts children's health, development and well-being.

Confidentiality and Consent

Your responses will remain confidential and will only be used for research purposes. Do you consent to participate in this interview?

Duration

This interview will take about 20–30 min. Do you have any questions before we begin?

Section A

Personal Background and Motivation

1. Can you tell me a little about your child and their interests in sports or physical activities?
2. What initially motivated you to consider swimming for your child?
3. Were there any personal experiences—yours or your child's—that influenced this decision?

Section B

Skill Acquisition and Safety Awareness

1. Can you describe what skills you hope your child will gain from swimming?
2. How do you think learning swimming will benefit your child in the long term?
3. Are there any specific swimming techniques or abilities you find most important for your child?
4. Is drowning prevention or water safety a concern that played a role in your decision?

Section C

Medical Advice and Health Professional Input

1. Has a doctor or healthcare professional ever suggested swimming for your child? If so, why?
2. How much influence do medical recommendations have on your decision to enroll your child in swimming?
3. Are there other health professionals (e.g., physiotherapists and occupational therapists) who have recommended swimming?

Section D

Perceptions of Health and Fitness

1. What does 'being healthy' mean to you when it comes to your child?
2. How do you think swimming contributes to your child's overall health?
3. Are there other activities you consider important for your child's health?

Section E

Physical and Motor Development

1. Have you noticed any changes in your child's movement or coordination since starting to swim?
2. What specific motor skills do you think swimming helps develop?
3. Were there any concerns about your child's physical development that led you to choose swimming?

Section F

Social and Emotional Growth

1. Have you observed any changes in your child's confidence since they started swimming? If yes, why might the child gain confidence?
2. Can you share an example of how swimming has impacted your child's self-esteem?
3. Do you think swimming helps children socially as well as emotionally? How?