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Analysis of the Practice of Nautical Activities in Schools

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Abstract: This study focuses on the analysis of nautical activities in school environments. The primary objective is to highlight the pivotal role of educators in optimizing the benefits and mitigating the risks associated with water activities in educational settings. To achieve this goal, ten interviews were conducted, evenly distributed among men and women from different countries who work in nautical activities with students in aquatic settings. Additionally, the Delphi method was employed to validate the interviews with expert opinions in the field from a group of nine experts. The analysis of the interviews revealed three significant dimensions, including safety, benefits, and sports-related aspects. The results demonstrate that nautical activities offer physical and cognitive benefits, promote ecological awareness, and foster values such as group cohesion, leadership, and respect. Furthermore, these activities have a positive impact on the physical and mental health of participants, encouraging socialization and conflict resolution. In conclusion, nautical activities in school environments provide a wide range of benefits but require continuous attention in terms of safety and adaptation for individuals with disabilities. These findings underscore the importance of promoting these practices as an integral part of the school curriculum.

Keywords: water sports; formal education; wellness; children; teenagers

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1. Introduction

The examination of nautical activities within the school context has garnered increasing attention in educational settings for various reasons [1]. We currently reside in a dynamic and highly technologically driven society wherein children and adolescents often find themselves largely disconnected from the natural environment, especially those dwelling in metropolitan areas. Thus, offering them opportunities that are integrated into their educational curriculum becomes crucial, as it enables them to reconnect with the essence of the natural world [2]. In fact, authors such as [3] emphasize the significance of the natural environment in enhancing the quality of life, even noting its therapeutic effects in stress reduction.

Some scholars argue that, despite centuries of sedentary urban living, humans have not yet fully adapted to city life [4]. For certain researchers, nature possesses intrinsic therapeutic qualities; merely passive exposure to natural settings can result in tangible functional improvements, such as decreased heart rate, alleviation of muscle tension, and reductions in blood pressure, among other benefits [5].

Another compelling aspect of involving schoolchildren in sports within natural environments is that even those less active during Physical Education classes often discover these settings to be more motivating and conducive to participation, as highlighted in [6]. The connection with nature seems to inspire greater engagement, fostering a positive environment for increased physical activity among students.

1.1. Health Benefits of Engaging in Physical Activity within Natural Aquatic Environments

The health benefits of engaging in physical activity within natural aquatic environments are well-documented. In addition to the numerous positive effects on physical, psychological, and social well-being reported among practitioners [7,8], these natural settings offer an ideal platform for holistic learning related to the associated subjects [9,10]. Furthermore, there is compelling evidence suggesting enhancements in students' commitment to learning, concentration, and behavior, along with potential positive impacts on teachers' job satisfaction when such activities are integrated into the school curriculum [11].

The practice of water sports, such as dinghy sailing (They are small boats, typically with a single hull and sail, suitable for one or two persons. The term 'dinghy' is used to describe small boats that are easy to handle and transport), yields significant health and personal development benefits in children and adolescents [12]. These activities foster positive emotions, fun, and excitement, reinforcing healthy behaviors and creating memorable experiences [13]. Furthermore, a substantial improvement in social and interpersonal skills is observed, including social interaction, problem-solving, decision-making, and communication [12], which are essential for personal development and future social integration. On a cognitive level, water sports promote critical thinking skills, such as planning and concentration [14]. The physical activity involved enhances physical fitness, strengthening muscles and endurance [12], and can prevent long-term health issues. Additionally, these sports have a positive impact on emotional and mental well-being, especially on mood and self-esteem [15,16], providing a means to release stress and improve mental health. In summary, water sports offer physical and mental benefits that support their integration into educational and sports programs for children, promoting holistic and healthy development.

Specifically, within the framework of educational curriculum subjects, the teaching of content linked to Physical Education in natural environments has a longstanding tradition [17]. In aquatic environments, for instance, it encourages the acquisition of new physical skills and abilities, such as navigation, course maintenance, comprehension of wind and current dynamics, and their application in the learning process. Moreover, it facilitates the enhancement of motor and psychomotor qualities, including strength, endurance, coordination, and balance. Importantly, these environments also serve as excellent spaces for acquiring knowledge in other subjects such as Natural Sciences, Social Sciences, and Mathematics [18–20]. In the best-case scenario, educational institutions can develop comprehensive projects centered around aquatic environments, where all subjects are taught in a motivating and contextually meaningful manner.

1.2. Formal Education and Ecological Awareness in Nautical Environments

Formal education plays a pivotal role in fostering ecological awareness in nautical environments. The growing urgency of environmental conservation, preservation, and enhancement is increasingly essential, given the escalating impact of ecological disasters on the natural environment, largely attributed to human activities [21,22]. Cultivating critical environmental awareness from an early age is essential. As stated by [23] (p. 73), "By connecting with nature and the natural world, children can develop their sense of belonging and responsibility towards the environment in general, which can ultimately foster the development of pro-environmental attitudes". Providing students with knowledge acquisition activities that involve direct interaction with nature, such as sailing, snorkeling, kayaking, and more, presents unique opportunities to comprehend the fragility of aquatic ecosystems while nurturing critical awareness of them. This approach takes students out of their comfort zones and beyond the classroom, offering them the invaluable gift of developing critical thinking aligned with the realities of our current ecosystem conditions [24,25].

1.3. Nautical Activities in Educational Environments

Traditionally, nautical activities have been associated with occupations carried out in aquatic settings, such as seafaring and fishing [26]. However, in modern times, following the industrial revolution and an increase in leisure time for workers, new avenues for leisure have emerged. This shift has led to the growth of a substantial industry that professionalizes and adapts to contemporary demands, capitalizing on this burgeoning market niche [27]. Within maritime and riverine environments, the expansion of free time has given rise to a subculture that embraces bodies of water for physical and sporting pursuits, fostering physical well-being, enjoyment, and a unique connection with ever-changing natural surroundings [28]. These activities have gained popularity among a diverse array of practitioners and are now firmly established in educational institutions within their respective regions, as it happens in Viana do Castelo, Portugal, after years of integrating nautical activities into the educational curriculum of local schools, municipal policies, along with certain specific funding, are exclusively allocated to promote these activities [29].

Presently, there is a scarcity of studies that investigate how these activities can enhance and enrich education [30], not only in the realm of physical development but across all subjects within formal education. It is imperative to explore this area further to establish a theoretical framework supporting these initiatives.

Nonetheless, it is evident that nautical activities in school settings hold great potential for the physical, cognitive, and emotional development of students, particularly when appropriately integrated into formal education. These activities offer genuinely meaningful learning experiences and, as suggested by [31], can serve as catalysts for fostering relationships and creating significance within our society.

Nautical activities are often conducted in natural environments characterized by a high degree of unpredictability, which greatly appeals to children and adolescents due to the inherent sense of adventure. Waterways and maritime routes become unique settings for the acquisition of new skills and competencies while fostering a firsthand understanding of the often-unfamiliar ecosystems in which they exist. This exposure cultivates environmental awareness, respect, and a deeper connection to their surroundings, qualities that endure over time and persist even after their school years [32].

Furthermore, engaging in sports within aquatic environments provides students with opportunities to develop various values, such as group cohesion, leadership, respect for authority, loyalty, education, commitment, and the ability to accept mistakes. These values are indispensable for shaping responsible adults, whether the activities are pursued individually, such as surfing, windsurfing, or sailing in "Optimist" boat (The Optimist is a type of small, single-handed sailing boat, characterized by a stable and easy-to-handle design. It is commonly used to teach young individuals the basic skills of sailing and navigation. To prevent confusion for the reader with the preceding vessel, Dinghy sailing encompasses the general practice of sailing small boats, whereas the 'Optimist boat' specifically refers to a type of single-handed dinghy designed for teaching children sailing skills). Additionally, important attributes such as commitment, perseverance, and resilience are instilled through these experiences, all of which are vital for effective social interaction within their communities, as highlighted by [33].

This paper analyzes different educational approaches and strategies employed in various European countries that incorporate nautical activities into school settings. It also addresses the diverse challenges that require attention for the enhancement of these curricular practices. These challenges notably encompass safety concerns and the effective mitigation of real risks, rather than just perceived ones, associated with physical activities in natural environments. To accomplish this, it is imperative to examine each participating country's definition of exemplary educational practices, the approaches taken at the instructional and student levels, the training provided to educators and other individuals working with students, and proposals for improvement in this domain.

In summary, the aim of this study is to emphasize the vital role of educators in maximizing the benefits and minimizing the risks associated with water activities in educational settings. The overarching goal is for the investigation to offer practical insights to educators, enabling the integration of secure and inclusive methodologies. Moreover, it seeks to promote both physical and mental well-being, foster social and personal development, and instill an appreciation for the natural environment among students.

2. Materials and Methods

This study employs a qualitative research methodology, focusing on the collection and analysis of interviews with individuals from a variety of professional backgrounds who interact with school children in aquatic environments through physical activity. Consequently, the sample comprised a total of ten interviews, evenly distributed between five women and five men, ensuring equitable representation between genders. These interviews were conducted within various interest groups related to the field of study, including managers of nautical activities, monitors of nautical activities, and educators from educational institutions of three different nationalities: Spanish, Portuguese, and English.

The present study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki (1964) and received prior approval from the Ethics Committee of the University of Huelva, specifically from the Commission for Doctoral Studies (Protocol Reference: Medina-Rebollo. 09/11). Before initiating the interviews, participants were adequately informed about the research objectives and the intended use of their data, exclusively for research purposes related to the study's subject. All participants were of legal age, provided their consent, and signed an electronically recorded informed consent form.

To establish the validity of the interview instrument used in our research, we sought expert opinions through the qualitative forecasting method known as the Delphi prospective approach. Initially, we compiled a panel of experts possessing specialized knowledge on the topic under investigation. We sought their insights on the particular subject, offering a thorough and enlightening justification for their involvement. This encompassed the meticulous and exhaustive selection of experts from a pool of individuals possessing specific expertise in the subject. Employing an anonymous methodology aimed at preventing mutual influences, and under the comprehensive supervision of the researcher, the experts were chosen with care. They were engaged in discussions related to the topic, and their responses underwent meticulous analysis to identify areas of consensus and divergence. The selection criteria included consideration of diverse professional domains, with assessments conducted by the coordinating group and self-evaluations by the experts. This meticulous selection process, guided by specific criteria, ensured both representativeness and expertise, thereby establishing a robust foundation for the validity of the interview and the quality of the results. Finally, we analyzed the responses received, identifying areas of consensus and any discrepancies among the experts.

The selection of these experts encompassed various professional domains, including academia, industry, and educational institutions, effectively representing the community of professionals involved in nautical activities and their instruction.

The experts were chosen based on two criteria: an evaluation by the research coordination team and self-assessment by the experts themselves regarding their competence in the research topic. The initial consultation involved 16 experts, with only nine meeting the satisfactory performance criteria established by [34], achieving high and/or moderate levels of competence in providing valid and reliable assessments of the research.

Of the nine experts selected, four were university professors who had integrated nautical activities into their curriculum within the field of Physical Activity and Sport Sciences across four different Spanish universities. All of them hold PhDs in Physical Activity and Sport Sciences. Three experts represented companies specializing in various nautical activities, while the remaining experts were teachers in public schools, one of them being in primary education and the other being in secondary education. The selection

of these individuals was based on the diversity of professional fields, including universities, companies, and educational institutions, aiming to comprehensively represent the community of professionals in nautical activities and education.

Following the validation process, we refined the interview questions to a set of 21 well-structured questions, deemed highly suitable for the study, displaying a substantial degree of agreement among the experts (Refer to Appendix A). Furthermore, experts suggested modifications to certain questions when necessary to elicit more comprehensive responses, thereby avoiding binary questions. To construct this interview, we relied on an underlying research question in the current study: 'How do educators, entrepreneurs and instructors perceive and address key aspects of nautical activities in an educational context, including factors such as safety, skill assessment, environmental considerations, and the potential impact on students' holistic development? Furthermore, how can these insights inform the development and implementation of effective nautical programs in primary and secondary education?' We endeavored to appropriately capture these questions in the interview script. Subsequently, the research procedure encompassed several stages, including conducting and recording the interviews, transcribing the interviews, and analyzing and coding the data using the qualitative analysis software MaxQDA. This program is specifically designed for the analysis of qualitative data, such as textual material, interviews, and transcripts. It allowed us to identify relevant dimensions and categories of information within the transcripts and assign appropriate labels. Additionally, it facilitated the identification of patterns, themes, and emerging trends in the participants' responses.

Consequently, we identified six substantial dimensions, focusing on three for the purpose of this work. These dimensions were methodology, environments, safety, benefits, and sport. In particular, we focused on the last three dimensions: safety, benefits, and sport, which further led to the identification of specific categories within each dimension.

Under the "Safety" dimension, the categories included "Before the activity", "During the activity", "Accident", and "Regulations". Within the "Benefits" dimension, the categories comprised "Health", "Socialization", "Conflict resolution", "Other values", and "Functional diversity". Lastly, the "Sport" dimension encompassed categories such as "Nautical activities", "Student knowledge", and "Environment".

The people selected to be interviewed were two entrepreneurs (E), two Sports Instructors of Nautic Sports (I), and six primary and secondary school teachers (T). This sample of individuals was selected through convenience sampling, drawing from the participants of the previously mentioned 'Atlantic Youth' project who expressed interest in being interviewed. The selection process always took into consideration their representativeness, and opinions were sought from the aforementioned experts before finalizing the choices.

In the subsequent sections, we will expound upon each of these categories and dimensions.

3. Results

Table 1 presents the quantitative findings resulting from the analysis of the interviews, which aimed at examining the most significant facets. It delineates the input from various participants, including entrepreneurs, instructors, and teachers. All of them were selected for their experience, with a minimum of five years of service in their field of work. The dimension with the highest frequency of occurrences is "Safety" (84), followed closely by "Benefits" (80) and "Sport" (63). This ranking underscores the significance of these themes for the interviewees and will serve as a foundation for presenting the qualitative analysis of their opinions.

In each dimension we analyze the quotes given by the participants who are part of the project. The ideas extracted are organized starting with those that are most shared, where the participants have offered the most information, and ending with those that are least commented on.

Table 1. Total count of the dimensions studied, according to monitors, entrepreneurs, and teachers.

	SAFETY	SPORTS	BENEFITS	TOTAL
Female Spanish Entrepreneur Woman (E)	6	6	7	19
Male French Entrepreneur (E)	7	6	7	20
Female French Instructor (I)	10	8	8	26
Male Spanish Instructor (I)	10	7	9	26
Female Spanish Teacher (T)	10	8	10	28
Male Spanish Teacher (T)	10	8	9	27
Female Portuguese Teacher (T)	8	3	7	18
Male Portuguese Teacher (T)	5	5	7	17
Female English Teacher (T)	8	5	9	22
Male English Teacher (T)	10	7	7	24
TOTAL	84	63	80	227

3.1. Safety

This dimension encompasses various facets pertaining to the assurance of physical and psychological well-being. To achieve this objective, distinct categories have been delineated, including preventive considerations concerning safety in the execution of aquatic activities, proactive measures during activity for safety enhancement, and reactive measures in response to accidents, as well as the sources and contents of relevant regulations.

Table 2 provides an overview of the contributions made by each participant in relation to the aforementioned categories. Notably, the subcategory "Safety during the activity" emerges with the highest number of contributions (30), trailed by "Before the activity" (21), "Regulations" (18), and "Accident" (15).

Table 2. Total count by safety subcategories.

CATEGORIES	E	E	I	I	T	T	T	T	T	T	Total
Before the Activity	1	2	2	2	3	2	1	2	3	3	21
During the Activity	2	3	4	3	3	4	2	3	2	4	30
Accident	1	1	2	2	2	2	1	2	1	1	15
Regulations	2	1	2	3	2	2	1	1	2	2	18

Notes: E = entrepreneur; I = instructor; T = teacher.

3.1.1. Safety during the Activity

The unanimous consensus among participants is the endorsement of a mandatory life jacket as a safety measure, with specific emphasis from two participants on the need for tailored jackets based on the participant's weight. Furthermore, three participants advocate for the mandatory use of a wetsuit to prevent hypothermia, scratches, or injuries during water activities. Depending on the activity, two participants suggest the advisability of additional safety gear such as helmets, gloves, or water shoes.

> "The mandatory safety equipment is the life jacket, which should be tailored to the weight of the participant" (Instructor).

All participants underscore the significance of evaluating environmental conditions, including wind, tide, waves, and rain, to adapt or cancel the activity if deemed unsafe. Instructors are unanimously seen as pivotal, requiring thorough training and experience to provide clear instructions. Four participants highlight the importance of well-maintained equipment, and one emphasizes prioritizing both group and instructor safety.

> "To reduce risks in water activities, we should consider the good condition of equipment, have a first aid kit, mobile phones in case of emergencies, a nearby means of transportation, follow the instructors' directions, and use the equipment properly" (Spanish Teacher).

Consistency in teaching safety rules is emphasized, with three participants advocating for uniformity across both experienced and inexperienced students. Assessing students' prior knowledge is recommended, particularly during the initial session. Only one participant suggests a differentiated approach based on students' expertise.

> "Before engaging in this type of aquatic activity, it is advisable to provide basic safety rules that must be followed by all participants. Due to its importance, this should be done the same way for both inexperienced and experienced students" (English Teacher).

Regarding supervision, two participants proposed the presence of at least two monitors, with one on a boat for emergency response. The training and experience of instructors in water activities are consistently emphasized by two participants.

> "In addition to the instructors who ensure the proper execution of the practice, there should be an instructor on a boat to respond quickly to any needs or accidents" (Instructor).

The results emphasize a holistic approach to safety in water activities, encompassing equipment, environmental assessment, instructor competence, and consistent safety rule communication.

3.1.2. Safety before the Activity

All participants highlight the necessity of knowing how to swim to engage in these types of activities. Specifically, seven of them emphasize its significant importance, as it can be helpful in case of an accident. Three participants express that it is not mandatory but advisable.

> "It is not essential to know how to swim to engage in aquatic activities since participants wear life jackets, although it is advisable" (Entrepreneur).

> "It is very important to know how to swim when engaging in aquatic activities because it provides the ability to handle any problems that may arise, potentially saving lives or preventing more serious incidents" (Spanish Teacher).

Six individuals believe that basic safety rules should be provided before commencing any aquatic activity, with all of them emphasizing that these rules should be given prior to the start of the session, although two entertain the possibility of providing them during the session.

> "We should establish basic rules of behavior and safety. It is crucial to raise awareness within the group about the risks associated with improper conduct in these types of activities" (Instructor).

Five participants would conduct a preliminary swimming test before allowing individuals to participate in such activities, while one participant thinks it is not important to conduct such a test. There is also an emphasis on the importance of conducting a water-based test to familiarize participants with the environment and observe their reaction in case they fall into the water. It is worth noting that four of these five participants did not mention whether it is necessary to conduct a swimming test for participants in aquatic activities.

> "To assess our students' swimming abilities, we would conduct water-based tests, such as swimming a specific distance back and forth, diving a certain distance, or transporting a weight from one point to another using their arms" (Spanish Teacher).

> "While wearing life jackets reduces the risk of drowning, it is necessary for participants to engage in a brief activity to verify this for themselves and ensure that they do not panic in the event of a fall" (Instructor).

3.1.3. Accident

All eight participants in this subcategory concur and emphasize the necessity for participants to have first aid knowledge, specifically CPR (Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation) skills, in the case of a drowning incident.

> "It is essential for students to have received first aid training, and I believe it should be mandatory for everyone, adults and children alike" (Entrepreneur).

In the event of an accident, four teachers would follow the PAS (Protect, Alert, and Secure) protocol, prioritizing the protection of the injured individual and other users to prevent further accidents. They would then alert authorities to receive assistance as quickly as possible. Finally, they would provide aid, including first aid and, if necessary, perform CPR. Notably, three teachers mention that they would not know what to do in case of an accident.

> "In the first place, remove the victim from the water and stop the activity so that the other students are not in danger without supervision, as the instructor attends to the victim. Next, administer first aid, emphasizing the importance of CPR in cases of cardiac and respiratory arrest. Once everything is under control, call emergency medical teams" (Portuguese Teacher).

3.1.4. Regulations

It is worth noting that more than half of the participants (six individuals) have no knowledge of the regulations governing nautical activities. Only two instructors possess knowledge about aspects such as the teacher-to-student ratio, which requires one instructor for every 12 primary school participants, with a minimum of two instructors. Only two instructors suggest that a first aid certification should be required to instruct in this type of activity.

> "For primary classes, one instructor is required for every 12 students, with a minimum of 2 instructors. For secondary school students, it's one instructor for 15 boats (regardless of the number of students on the boat), with a minimum of 2 instructors" (Instructor).

> "All instructors should hold a Level 1 first aid certification" (Instructor).

3.2. Benefits

In this dimension, those aspects related to the benefits that aquatic activities provide to the individuals who engage in them are found. These benefits may include improvements in health, advancements in interpersonal skills and conflict resolution, advantages for individuals with disabilities, and potential risks.

Table 3 displays the contributions pertaining to the aforementioned categories made by each of the participants. In this case, it is evident that the Health subcategory has the highest number of contributions (32), followed by Socialization (14), Other values (12), Conflict resolution (11), and lastly, Functional diversity (10).

Table 3. Total count by benefit subcategories.

CATEGORIES	E	E	I	I	T	T	T	T	T	T	Total
Health	3	3	3	4	3	3	3	2	5	3	32
Socialization	1	1	2	2	3	2	1	1	1	1	15
Conflict Resolution	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	11
Other Values	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	2	1	1	12
Functional Diversity	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	10

Notes: E = entrepreneur; I = instructor; T = teacher.

3.2.1. Health

Nine participants indicate that nature-based activities have a positive effect on health, and only one participant is uncertain about whether these effects occur. Among the positive effects, five individuals mention the benefits typical of any physical activity. Four people emphasize improvements in physical fitness, and three individuals state that it helps relieve stress and make them feel better. Six participants discuss the durability of these health effects, mentioning that they can be both short-term and long-term, although two of them highlight that long-term benefits can only be achieved if these students continue to practice these sports.

> "It's a content that is quite attractive to students, and the fact that they practice it can lead them to continue doing it in the future. In the short term, we get students to engage in physical activity in their leisure time, and in the long term, it could lead to health improvements due to physical activity" (English teacher).

All participants indicate that this experience with water sports will encourage some participants to continue practicing these activities regularly or occasionally. Seven of them highlight that water sports are unknown to a large part of the population, and that these programs provide a great opportunity for their use in leisure time.

> "These programs help connect water sports with society because only a small percentage of these students have knowledge of them. After trying them, some of them may want to continue doing them" (Instructor).

Four participants suggest that there is no risk associated with water activities, or that the risk is minimal. Three participants state that the risk is low but similar to other sports (overuse, tears, etc.). Two participants mention that there may be risks of accidents or injuries if safety rules are not followed. Finally, one participant suggests that because these activities take place in an environment with uncertainty, there can be risks of accidents.

> "To reduce risks in water activities, we will consider the good condition of the equipment, a first aid kit, mobile phones in case a call is needed, having a means of transportation nearby, following the instructors' instructions, and using the equipment properly" (Spanish teacher).

3.2.2. Socialization

All the individuals participating in this subcategory (9) indicate that the teamwork required in these types of activities, whether through assistance or cooperation to achieve a common goal, promotes the creation of emotional bonds and the formation of new friendships. They also emphasize that groupings, whether due to engaging in a team sport or practicing the same individual sport, facilitate communication and mutual support among students who are sharing the same experience. This leads to the emergence of friendships among people who have had no prior contact because they have different interests.

> "Water sports, being unfamiliar to the students, encourage everyone to help each other to do them correctly. New friendships are created through this mutual assistance" (Portuguese teacher).

> "The groupings in water activities help create new friends, allowing people with different characteristics and interests to get to know each other" (Instructor).

Five individuals mention that engaging in water activities in an environment that generates uncertainty encourages collaboration to achieve a goal and eliminates prejudices. Additionally, one participant suggests that since it is a novel activity, it helps everyone start from the same level, which promotes integration.

> "These activities make people who, in a normalized environment, have no relationship with each other, collaborate with each other" (Instructor).

Five people highlight values related to social aspects, such as respect for peers, teamwork, mutual assistance, communication among peers, empathy, camaraderie, friendship, and solidarity, among others.

> "Water activities develop a series of values such as teamwork, help, and cooperation within the groups of the students themselves" (Entrepreneur).

3.2.3. Conflict Resolution

Eight individuals mention that the ongoing collaboration among participants in nautical activities encourages teamwork and continuous mutual assistance, thus favoring important aspects such as conflict resolution. Five participants indicate that communication fosters getting to know others, empathizing with them, and helping to peacefully resolve any differences.

> "Nautical activities allow for the development of respect for others, enhancing the collective sense. Living together in cooperative activities facilitates the resolution of possible problems through dialogue" (Entrepreneur).

> "Nautical activities promote improved communication, better understanding of others, and thus help prevent conflicts among them" (Instructor).

In addition to collaboration and communication, participants highlight other factors that contribute to improving conflict resolution, such as the relaxed and playful atmosphere (3), adherence to rules to ensure proper teamwork (2), and the acceptance of skill level differences that are often present in these activities (1).

> "Nautical activities require compliance with rules, discipline, and respect, which can be channeled and reflected in each individual's personal life, helping to prevent conflicts and confrontations among students" (Instructor).

3.2.4. Other Values

Eight participants believe that engaging in nautical activities promotes confidence and reduces fear of the aquatic environment, which often stems from unfamiliarity with it. Additionally, these activities help create positive experiences, enhance self-confidence, and boost self-esteem.

> "I believe that one of the most important aspects that nautical activities address is fostering confidence in practicing sports in the aquatic environment, as it is not our natural habitat and fears can exist" (Instructor).

Six individuals indicate that nautical activities promote a range of values that contribute to personal development. Among these values, they emphasize leisure time engagement in a recommended activity (6), environmental awareness (4), respect for peers (4), communication (2), and self-esteem (2).

> "Engaging in water sports helps educate students because it requires them to put down their phones and communicate. It's also good for reducing stress and filling leisure time with a healthy activity" (English teacher).

Five participants highlight that nautical activities contribute to increased knowledge of the natural environment in their vicinity, which can also be a source of economic resources for the area (4). Additionally, they emphasize how these activities raise awareness and highlight the importance of environmental conservation (4).

> "Water sports provide students with greater sensitivity and awareness of the environment, professional opportunities, economic resources, and a deeper understanding of natural environments" (Entrepreneur).

3.2.5. Functional Diversity

All subjects emphasize that the normalized practice of aquatic activities by individuals with disabilities improves self-confidence, as they can successfully engage in an activity

they may not be familiar with, thereby boosting their self-esteem by realizing they can participate in the same activities as others.

> "People with disabilities gain confidence when they engage in activities that are not common for them, such as nautical activities, which helps improve their self-esteem" (Portuguese teacher).

Eight participants agree that engaging in aquatic activities has the same benefits for people with disabilities as it does for those without disabilities. Five participants highlight that nautical activities enhance the socialization skills of individuals with disabilities, reinforcing their inclusion and breaking down barriers. Three individuals emphasize improvements in health as a result of engaging in physical activity. They also emphasize some of these benefits, such as the recreational aspect as a means to break away from routine and occupy leisure time (5), which helps divert their attention from disability-related issues (3).

> "The benefits individuals with disabilities obtain from participating in nautical activities are the same as those for others, although some of these benefits may be more pronounced" (Spanish teacher).

> "The main benefit these individuals receive is internal, as these activities, being recreational, allow them to enjoy themselves, have a good time, and forget about their daily problems" (Instructor).

> "Aquatic activities have a greater impact on people with disabilities in terms of physical fitness development, postural control, mastery of perceptual-motor skills, improvement in health, and strengthening weakened systems and structures" (Spanish teacher).

It is worth noting the input from three individuals who point out that the major challenge for people with disabilities in participating in aquatic activities is that the facilities and equipment used for these activities are not adapted to their needs, making it inconvenient for them to participate.

> "Aquatic activities have a greater impact on people with disabilities in terms of physical fitness development, postural control, mastery of perceptual-motor skills, improvement in health, and strengthening weakened systems and structures" (Spanish teacher).

3.3. Sport

This dimension encompasses various aspects related to the water sports practiced by those responsible for the activities, their motivations for engaging in these activities, the knowledge they bring to conducting nautical activity sessions, the knowledge students have about water sports, and whether this experience can encourage them to continue practicing these sports.

Table 4 presents contributions pertaining to the different categories mentioned by each of the participants. In this case, it is evident that the "Water Sports" subcategory has the highest number of contributions (27), followed by "Environment" (19) and "Knowledge" (17).

Table 4. Total count by sport subcategories.

CATEGORIES	E	E	I	I	T	T	T	T	T	T	Total
Aquatic activities	3	3	4	4	3	4	0	1	3	2	27
Student Knowledge	1	1	2	2	2	2	1	2	1	3	17
Natural Environment	2	2	2	1	3	2	2	2	1	2	19

Notes: E = entrepreneur; I = instructor; T = teacher.

3.3.1. Aquatic Activities

There are five interviewees who indicate that they have a high level of proficiency in water sports, while four mention having an intermediate level. Among the most commonly practiced water sports are kayaking (9), windsurfing (6), sailing (6), and paddle surfing (5). The reasons why individuals engage in water sports vary, with some mentioning their connection to nature (4), improvement in health (2), the recreational aspect (2), having practiced them since childhood (2), and the enhancement of personal aspects such as self-esteem, self-control, and self-improvement (1).

> "The water sports I have practiced and in which I have intermediate to high-level knowledge are kayaking, paddle surfing, windsurfing, and sailing" (Spanish teacher).

> "I'm interested in water sports because they are not widely practiced or known by students, and they help them connect with nature, appreciate the richness of natural spaces, in this case, beaches, rivers, etc." (Spanish teacher).

All the individuals participating in this section (9) indicate that having knowledge of and experience in various water sports significantly aids in teaching them. Specifically, six of them emphasize its great importance as it provides insights into how to teach these sports and boosts their own confidence. Moreover, greater experience can help prevent risks. The other three participants mention that if a teacher practices a water sport, they can serve as a role model for their students, creating a safe environment and motivating them to engage in these activities.

> "This kind of knowledge is fundamental to know how to teach these types of sports, which, due to their characteristics, are different from many others" (Instructor).

3.3.2. Student Knowledge

Regarding the question about how they perceive the initial nautical skills of the students they interact with and the percentage of them holding a nautical qualification, the interviewees expressed themselves as follows, and five participants in this study mentioned that the overall level of knowledge about water sports is low, with only a few having practiced any water sports occasionally. Two participants indicate that this level is moderate, with a wide range of knowledge levels among student groups. Finally, two individuals state that the level is high, but this is primarily due to the accessibility of these sports in coastal areas.

> "I'm not sure if I can provide a percentage of students with knowledge of these sports; this percentage depends on each region; in coastal areas, the percentage should be higher; in regions far from the sea, the percentage should be lower. In general, between 40% and 50% of students in Portugal have knowledge of these activities or have practiced some water sports" (Portuguese teacher).

All participants in this subcategory (7) indicate that by implementing these types of programs, some students will continue to practice water sports in the future, either regularly or occasionally.

> "Some of these students will continue practicing these sports for various reasons: because their environment allows it, others because they have discovered an activity they are good at, others because they enjoy it and have a good time, etc. And the implementation of these programs is promoting and facilitating the practice of these activities" (Spanish teacher).

3.3.3. Natural Environment

All participants (9) in this category express that the environmental impact of water sports is low, minimal, or non-existent, as long as basic rules are followed (5). Among

the existing sources of pollution, the vast majority highlight the disposal of plastics and garbage into the water by practitioners (7).

> "The impact caused on the environment by water sports is due to poor practices by participants who throw plastics and garbage into the water" (Portuguese teacher).

Seven participants indicate that among the measures they would take are the implementation of basic rules, such as not littering in the water (7), respecting the fauna and flora of the ecosystem (4), and raising awareness through talks during the practice to ensure this behavior is sustained over time (3). Additionally, five of them mention that, in addition to not polluting, they would engage in activities such as cleaning up the shores, collecting floating plastics in the water, and picking up any type of litter that can be transported.

> "To care for and respect the environment, we must ensure that participants in the activity follow basic rules to avoid pollution. In addition, raising environmental awareness is essential, and we will address this in the initial session and during the remaining practical sessions. It would also be beneficial to have a protocol of action, for example, if we find plastics or garbage, it would be correct to collect them so that they can be properly disposed of" (English teacher).

4. Discussion

Aquatic activities provide a source of enjoyment and recreation, but they also entail inherent risks that can jeopardize the physical and psychological well-being of participants. Safety must be addressed from various perspectives. One of the crucial aspects emphasized by all participants is the importance of safety equipment, with the life jacket as a mandatory item, which aligns with [35]. They considered safety to be the most relevant aspect for participants engaging in these practices. Additionally, the proper fit of the life jacket to the participant's weight is highlighted as a key point. Some participants also suggest the mandatory use of a wetsuit to prevent hypothermia, in line with [36], and injuries mainly caused by lacerations with the materials used or by hypothermia, as pointed out by [37]. Other authors even add its importance in preventing parasitic diseases such as leptospirosis [38].

Evaluating environmental conditions such as wind, tide, waves, and rain before engaging in the activity is considered essential by many of the interviewees. While they approached it from the perspective of the participating student, other authors such as [39] highlight the importance of assessing these conditions to use them to the participants' advantage and prepare athletes for the activity they are about to undertake. This evaluation allows for the adaptation of the activity or, in extreme cases, its suspension to ensure the safety of participants.

The training and experience of instructors are crucial factors mentioned by several participants. Some authors, such as [40], stress that adolescents, in particular, require role models, often found in the individuals who serve as coaches in these sports. Therefore, the correct selection and training of participants assuming these roles during this stage is of paramount importance. Clear communication of instructions and proper equipment maintenance are highlighted to ensure group safety. Furthermore, the need to assess participants' prior knowledge, especially in the first session to prevent potential accidents due to some participants' lack of experience, is mentioned. In this regard, ref. [41] suggest that a prior questionnaire on past illnesses and injuries can help prevent problems in the present.

The presence of at least two monitors, one in the water and another on a boat for emergencies, is considered an important measure. This ensures a swift response in the case of incidents, although most of the studies found emphasize the importance of having at least one rescue boat with preferably a medical or first aid-trained personnel on board [42]. The training and experience of these monitors are also highlighted.

The need to impart basic safety rules before the activity is a point on which all participants agree. These rules should be presented before the session, although some consider the possibility of presenting them during the activity. While interviewees specifically address the physical safety of participants, it is important to note the opinions of some authors, such as [43], who emphasize that safety also results from the anxiety with which the student exposes themselves to the activity. In this regard, the role of a coach providing security through calm conversation before, during, and after the activity can be fundamental in minimizing risks in these sports.

Swimming is mentioned as a fundamental requirement for participating in water activities, and most participants concur on its importance. Some point out that, while not strictly necessary, it is highly recommended. For many authors, the ability to swim should be a mandatory part of students' curriculum, as highlighted by [44], as it maximizes safety in aquatic environments. In this sense, conducting a preliminary swimming test for participants is a suggested measure by some interviewees, while others do not mention it.

First aid knowledge, especially CPR, is highlighted by interviewees as essential for instructors and highly necessary for participants. This ensures that participants are prepared to respond in case of drowning or other accidents while waiting for specialized technical assistance, aligning with the majority of studies where this technique is mentioned, such as [45].

Health emerges as a significant focal point, emphasizing the positive influence of water activities on participants' well-being, as evidenced by studies such as [46]. For instance, ref. [29], a study encompassing over 500 schoolchildren engaged in surfing, rowing, canoeing, and sailing reported holistic health benefits. Corresponding to general physical activity research [47], encompassing improved physical fitness and stress relief, water-based activities showcase favorable outcomes. Notably, refs. [12,48] underscore psychological advantages, linking engagement in nautical activities such as light sailing among 9 to 13-year-old students to crucial life skills, mental well-being, and self-esteem, akin to [29]. Furthermore, ref. [46] investigation into a school surfing program delved into its role in reducing the risk of cardiovascular diseases, as well as enhancing the quality of life for individuals with chronic diseases such as heart conditions [48,49]. It is also emphasized that these positive effects persist over both the short- and long-term, with sustained practice participants also emphasizing that experience with water sports encourages ongoing or occasional practice of these activities beyond the time spent in their classes, making programs a unique opportunity for leisure activities. In fact, authors such as [50] point out the positive relationship between participating in these activities in the classroom and engaging them in leisure time.

Socialization is another relevant aspect, which, in addition to being mentioned by the interviewees, is a common theme among different authors who study water sports [51,52]. It is highlighted that the teamwork required in these activities fosters the creation of emotional bonds and the formation of new friendships. Groupings, whether in team or individual sports, promote communication and mutual assistance, facilitating interaction among people with different interests. Moreover, it is mentioned that water activities, taking place in an environment that generates uncertainty, promote collaboration and the elimination of prejudices. Social values such as respect, empathy, companionship, and solidarity are also emphasized.

Another aspect that interviewees pointed out was the importance of water sports in conflict resolution. Specifically, they noted that continuous collaboration among participants in water activities fosters conflict resolution and often minimizes conflicts. Effective communication allows participants to get to know each other and resolve differences peacefully. Other factors contributing to conflict resolution include the relaxed and playful atmosphere, adherence to rules, and acceptance of differences in skill levels in these activities. Some other authors also suggest that if these aquatic programs are combined with different educational models such as personal and social responsibility, their positive effects on participants are multiplied [53].

Participants noted other values of water activities, such as building confidence and reducing fear of aquatic environments, which improves self-esteem and self-confidence. They also offer healthy alternatives for leisure time, promote respect for peers, enhance communication skills, and boost self-esteem. Moreover, they highlight the importance of getting to know the nearby natural environment and its potential economic value, as well as raising awareness about environmental conservation, which, for authors such as [54], is necessary to include in physical education classes as a fundamental topic.

Regarding the environmental impact their students create, interviewees considered it to be minimal or negligible. However, they have observed uncivil and polluting behaviors from other practitioners, especially the dumping of plastics and garbage into the water, which is well-documented [55]. Participants propose measures to minimize the environmental impact and raise awareness of it, including establishing rules to prevent pollution, respecting the ecosystem's fauna and flora, and offering awareness talks during practice. Additionally, some participants suggest shoreline cleaning activities and the collection of floating debris in the water. Overall, the common thread emphasizes the importance of educating people about the human impact on the environment through their own experiences in the natural environment [56].

It is essential to address the environmental impact of these activities through the implementation of regulations and conservation measures. Education plays a fundamental role in promoting the continuous practice of water sports among students, which can lead to a greater appreciation of the natural environment and the development of sports skills throughout their lives.

It is emphasized that water activities have similar benefits for participants with and without disabilities. It is underscored that these activities enhance self-confidence, self-esteem, and socialization abilities in individuals with disabilities. However, it is highlighted that the lack of adaptation of facilities and materials in centers dedicated to water activities poses a challenge. Furthermore, some authors also point to the personnel working in service-providing facilities as partly responsible for this, as they often lack specific training to deal with cases that come to their facilities [57].

The general knowledge of students about water sports is described as low to moderate, with some variations among groups. However, the implementation of specific programs for water activities seems to have a positive impact on fostering future participation. Participants emphasize that these programs can influence some students to continue practicing water sports in the future, either regularly or occasionally. This reflects the importance of education and early exposure to these activities to foster a lasting interest in water sports. Nonetheless, other authors suggest that the practice itself is not essential for creating future adherence and that it should be accompanied by complementary strategies, such as allowing children to take responsibility for their decisions, focusing on the process rather than the outcome, or encouraging children to take responsibility for their own evaluation process, among others [58].

The study adeptly acknowledges certain limitations, particularly its reliance on perspectives exclusively from participants in the "Atlantic Youth" project. The utilization of a convenience sampling method is recognized as a potential constraint that may limit the diversity of viewpoints. To attain a more comprehensive understanding, future research has the opportunity to adopt a sampling approach that is more varied and representative. An exploration of the integration of educational models, specifically personal and social responsibility, in conjunction with water sports programs, presents a promising avenue for optimizing positive outcomes. A positive trajectory in research involves addressing environmental impacts through the implementation of well-designed regulations that emphasize sustainable practices.

We acknowledge that while the questionnaire is valid for this study, in future research, it could be enhanced by incorporating additional qualitative tools, such as in-depth interviews or open-ended questions that encourage respondents to freely discuss emerging

topics. This approach may likely bring to light new themes that are relevant to the research and warrant further exploration.

Essential to this trajectory is an inclusive approach in addressing challenges encountered by individuals with disabilities. Additionally, further investigation into alternative strategies can significantly contribute to a holistic understanding, emphasizing the cultivation of decision-making skills and self-evaluation for sustaining engagement in water sports.

5. Conclusions

This work emphasizes the pivotal role of educators in optimizing the benefits and mitigating risks associated with water activities within educational settings. Several actionable insights have emerged:

Primarily, educators should integrate robust safety protocols seamlessly into curricula, with a focus on the mandatory use of life jackets and wetsuits. Prioritizing the pre-assessment of environmental conditions and ensuring comprehensive training for instructors is imperative for participant safety.

Recognizing swimming as a fundamental skill, educators are encouraged to incorporate swimming lessons into physical education programs. A heightened emphasis on first aid education, especially CPR training, enables students to respond effectively to potential emergencies during water activities.

Furthermore, educators are strategically positioned to advocate for the positive impacts of water activities on both physical and mental health. Encouraging regular or occasional engagement in water sports can underscore short-term and long-term benefits, including enhanced physical fitness and stress reduction.

Water activities offer an optimal environment for fostering socialization, teamwork, and emotional bonds among students. Educators are urged to design activities that promote effective communication, teamwork, and the dismantling of prejudices, reinforcing critical social values such as respect, empathy, and companionship.

In light of the study's findings on the contribution of water activities to conflict resolution and the development of values such as confidence, environmental awareness, and self-esteem, educators should seamlessly integrate these aspects into broader character education programs.

Actively promoting the positive inclusion of individuals with disabilities in water activities, educators must concurrently address challenges related to facility and material adaptation to foster an inclusive environment.

Moreover, water activities offer a holistic approach to enhancing students' physical and mental well-being, personal and social development, and environmental awareness. Educators are encouraged to advocate for comprehensive, experiential learning opportunities that extend beyond traditional classroom settings.

Recognizing the perpetual need for attention to safety and inclusive practices, educators should prioritize continuous education for both students and instructors. Early exposure to water activities, coupled with ongoing educational initiatives, can instill a lasting interest in water sports and cultivate a heightened appreciation for the natural environment.

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Appendix A

INTERVIEWING TEACHERS/INSTRUCTORS/ENTREPRENEURS IN NAUTICAL ACTIVITIES

1. What sparked your interest in nautical sports? Have you participated in nautical sports previously? To what extent are you knowledgeable about these sports, and how does this knowledge enhance your ability to conduct these sessions?
2. What essential educational elements should nautical activities incorporate? Can they be integrated into primary and/or secondary education?
3. What percentage of students typically possess some degree of familiarity with nautical sports? Do you believe this familiarity is conducive to engaging in activities of this nature? Why or why not?
4. How do you assess the initial skill level of the students? What teacher-to-student ratio is deemed appropriate to ensure the effective execution of these activities?
5. What considerations should be made regarding the safety of the group before embarking on nautical activities? Which fundamental safety equipment should be mandatory?
6. How crucial is swimming proficiency for participation in aquatic activities? What specific assessments do you deem necessary to ascertain a participant's ability to respond effectively in emergency situations?
7. What organizational measures and regulations should be implemented to mitigate the risks associated with nautical activities? Should these measures differ for inexperienced participants and experts? If so, why?
8. Are you familiar with the current regulations governing water sports? What are your thoughts on these regulations, and would you propose any modifications or additional measures?
9. Could you outline the general protocol for responding to accidents in aquatic environments? What level of first aid knowledge do you consider essential in the event of an accident?
10. What overarching objectives do you believe should be achieved through a nautical activities program? What personal objectives do you set in relation to nautical sports?
11. What specific knowledge, skills, and attitudes do you think should be incorporated into a nautical program?
12. Regarding activities such as light sailing, canoeing, surfing, and rowing, what fundamental technical navigation skills should students acquire as part of a school nautical program?
13. How do you educate students about the characteristics of the environment and foster respect for the environment in which they engage in activities?
14. What particular methodology is employed in teaching nautical activities? Are the students' characteristics considered when designing teaching and learning activities?
15. From an organizational perspective, what approach do you believe is most suitable for working with a typical class group? How would you handle different group dynamics? What organizational challenges might arise, and how would you address them on days with adverse weather conditions?

16. In your opinion, which key subjects can be interconnected with a nautical activities program? How does this integration contribute to skill development?
17. What environmental impact do water sports have, in your view? What environmental conservation measures do you believe should be introduced within educational settings, and how would you implement them?
18. How do you evaluate students' awareness and comprehension of the environmental aspects you emphasize?
19. How can the knowledge gained from a program of aquatic activities benefit students in their lives? Do you anticipate that some will continue to engage in these activities during their leisure time? If so, why?
20. Can nautical activities facilitate the creation of new social networks and foster integration among different groups? How does collaborative group work and peer cooperation promote this?
21. In your opinion, how does this type of activity allow for the exploration and improvement of conflict resolution skills?

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