

The Effect of Specific Strength Training on the Time Performance of 200m Breaststroke Swimmers

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Received: 20/02 /2026 Accepted: 04/06 /2026 Published: 06/06 /2026

Abstract:

This research aims to identify the effect of a proposed strength training program on performance in the 200m breaststroke. We used an experimental design with two groups (experimental and control). The research sample consisted of 20 swimmers from Al-Jeel Sports Club for Youth of Qadiriya, selected purposively. SPSS was used for statistical analysis. The results showed that the experimental group, which applied strength training, outperformed the control group in improving their 200m breaststroke time.

KEY WORDS : SPECIFIC STRENGTH TRAINING, 200M BREASTSTROKE, TIME PERFORMANCE.

الملخص:

يهدف البحث إلى التعرف على أثر برنامج تدريبي مقترح لتطوير القوة النوعية على الأداء الرقمي في سباق 200م صدر، استخدمنا المنهج التجريبي بمجموعتين (التجريبية والضابطة). عينة البحث (20) سباحاً من نادي الجيل الرياضي لشباب قادية، تم اختيارهم بالطريقة العمدية، تم استخدام حزمة SPSS كوسائل إحصائية. وتوصلت نتائج إلى تفوق المجموعة التجريبية التي طبقت تدريبات القوة النوعية على المجموعة الضابطة في تحسين زمن سباق 200م صدر.

الكلمات المفتاحية: تدريب القوة، سباحة الصدر، الأداء الرقمي.

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1-Introduction:

Swimming is a competitive activity characterized by unique mechanical and hydrodynamic constraints. High performance requires a delicate balance between reducing frontal resistance and increasing **Propulsive Force**. In this context, the **Breaststroke** emerges as the stroke most dependent on lower limb efficiency. Maglisco (2020) indicates that the force generated by the leg kick in breaststroke contributes between 60% and 80% of the swimmer's total speed, a percentage significantly higher than in freestyle, butterfly, or backstroke.

The physical challenge in the 200m breaststroke lies in maintaining **Stroke Length** under the pressure of muscular fatigue caused by lactic acid accumulation. This race is classified under **Anaerobic Endurance** activities. Olsson and Taylor (2022) emphasize that linking **Dry-land** strength training with in-water explosive power is the key to developing "Swimming Economy." The greater the swimmer's specific strength, the fewer strokes are needed to cover the distance, thereby conserving energy for the final stages of the race.

Despite the importance of general strength, modern trends in sports training have begun to focus on the "**Principle of Specificity**." Smith (2022) demonstrated that strength programs that do not simulate the mechanical angles of the breaststroke kick may improve muscle mass without a real reflection on the chronological performance. Herein lies the problem of the current research; the researcher observed through field monitoring of the **El-Jil Sporting Club (Kadiria)** swimmers a significant drop in speed during the last 50 meters, indicating a gap between raw physical abilities and their specific application in water.

This research seeks to move beyond traditional training methods by proposing a program that integrates **Plyometrics** and targeted water resistance training. The goal is not only to strengthen the working muscles but also to improve neuromuscular coordination to ensure the **Transfer of Training** directly to the breaststroke motor path, aligning with Hussein and Ghanem (2023) on the necessity of individualizing training based on the motor requirements of each specialty.

1-1- Research Problem

The 200m breaststroke imposes a complex physical and physiological burden, falling in the transitional zone between anaerobic performance and strength endurance. The fundamental difficulty lies in the nature of the breaststroke movement itself, characterized by "Dead Points" in

the stroke cycle. Overcoming inertia and re-accelerating the body consumes a significant amount of energy and explosive power from the lower limbs.

Scientific literature reveals a gap in addressing "**Specific Strength**" for breaststroke swimmers. The issue remains: "to what extent can a swimmer transfer strength gained on land to the aquatic environment?" Many programs focus on general strength, which may increase muscle volume—leading to increased **Drag**—without a proportional increase in **Propulsive Force**.

Through field experience at El-Jil Sporting Club, the researcher noted a "**Technical Decay**" in the final 50 meters, manifested as a decreased Stroke Length and a disorganized increase in **Stroke Rate**. This is attributed to insufficient "Specific Strength" required to maintain ideal technique under lactic acid pressure. Thus, the problem crystallizes in a core question: Can a proposed program merging simulated dry-land strength and water resistance training develop the performance of 200m breaststroke swimmers?

1-1-1- Research Questions

- Are there statistically significant differences between the pre-and post-measurements of the experimental group in specific strength variables (explosive power of lower limbs)?
- Are there statistically significant differences between the pre-and post-measurements of the experimental group in the 200m breaststroke time performance?
- Are there statistically significant differences in the post-measurements between the experimental and control groups in specific strength and time performance?
- What is the improvement rate achieved by the proposed program in the mechanical efficiency (Stroke Length) of the leg kick?

1-1-2- Research Hypotheses

- There are statistically significant differences between pre-and post-measurements of the experimental group in specific strength variables in favor of the post-measurement.
- There are statistically significant differences in 200m breaststroke time performance in favor of the post-measurement.
- There are statistically significant differences in post-measurements between the experimental and control groups in favor of the experimental group.
- The proposed program leads to positive improvement rates in mechanical efficiency (Stroke Length and Rate).

2- General objective of the study:

2-1- Designing a proposed specific strength program integrating dry-land and water resistance.

2-2- Identifying the effect of the program on developing specific strength variables (explosive power).

2-3 Measuring the effectiveness of specific training in improving the 200m breaststroke time.

2-4- Detecting differences between the experimental and control groups in physical and digital variables.

2-5- Determining improvement rates in mechanical performance efficiency (Stroke Length).

3- Procedural definition of the concepts mentioned in the research:

3-1- Defining and understanding terminology

3-1-1- Specific Strength Training

Conceptual Definition: "Physical exercises aimed at developing physical qualities specific to the type of sporting activity practiced, such that they mimic the movement path, joint angles, and type of muscle action required for the race."

"Specific strength training works to improve performance levels by focusing on the muscles involved in the skill, using the same speed and range of motion required" (Bastawisi Ahmed, 1999).

Operational Definition: A set of resistance exercises (weights, elastic bands) performed by **El-Jil Sportive Club** swimmers on land (dryland). These exercises simulate the pulling and kicking movements of the breaststroke and are implemented according to a structured temporal program (e.g., 3 sessions per week for 10 weeks).

3-1-2- Time Performance

Conceptual Definition: "The level achieved by the athlete during competition, expressed in quantitative units of measurement (time). It is the final result of all aspects of physical, technical, and psychological preparation."

"Time is the only objective measure to judge the progress level in swimming competitions, as it reflects the swimmer's efficiency in integrating strength with technique" (Talha Hossam El-Din, 1994).

Operational Definition: The time recorded in minutes, seconds, and fractions of a second achieved by the swimmer in the 200m breaststroke race. It is measured through pre-tests and post-tests of the proposed strength program to compare the extent of development.

3-1-3- 200m Breaststroke

Conceptual Definition: One of the competitive swimming events categorized under endurance distances. It is characterized as the most energy-consuming swimming stroke due to its coordinated movement patterns and high water resistance.

"200m breaststroke performance depends heavily on the balance between stroke length and frequency, requiring high efficiency in generating force from the legs" (Maglisco, 2003 – Translated).

Operational Definition: The legal distance (200m) covered by the research sample swimmers in the **El-Jil Sportive Club** pool, while adhering to all technical conditions and regulations set by the International Swimming Federation (**World Aquatics**).

3-2- Related Studies :

- **Hussein & Ghanem (2023):** Focused on specific strength and its impact on middle-distance swimmers; results showed significant improvement in race time.
- **Olsson & Taylor (2022):** Proved that integrated plyometrics increased Stroke Length by 12% compared to traditional training.
- **Smith (2022):** Identified lower limb explosive power as the primary predictor of success in 200m breaststroke.

4- The methodological procedures used in the study:

4-1- Research Methodology:

The researcher used the Experimental Method with a two-group design (Experimental and Control) using pre-and post-measurements.

4-2-1- Population and Sample :

- Sample: 20 swimmers (15 years old) from El-Jil Sporting Club.
- Experimental Group (n=10): Applied the proposed specific strength program.
- Control Group (n=10): Followed the traditional club program.

4-3-2- Homogeneity and Equivalence:

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(Table 1 shows no statistically significant differences between the two groups in anthropometric, physical, and digital variables prior to the experiment, confirming equivalence).

Variables	Unit	Experimental Group (n=10)	Control Group (n=10)	t-value	Sig.	Statistical Significance
Chronological Age	Year	± 15.40 0.52	± 15.40 0.48	0.443	0.663	Non-Significant
Height	cm	± 172.5 3.12	± 171.8 2.85	0.522	0.608	Non-Significant
Weight	kg	± 64.2 4.15	± 63.90 3.80	0.168	0.868	Non-Significant
Vertical Jump	cm	± 38.50 2.10	± 37.90 2.35	0.602	0.554	Non-Significant
Standing Broad Jump	m	± 2.05 0.12	± 2.02 0.15	0.493	0.628	Non-Significant
m 200 Breaststroke Time	Second	± 168.4 4.25	± 169.2 3.90	0.438	0.666	Non-Significant

- Results Interpretation

Table (1) shows that the calculated (t) value for all variables (growth, physical, and performance) is lower than the tabulated (t) value at a significance level of (0.05) and degrees of freedom (18). Furthermore, the significance level (Sig) for all variables is greater than (0.05), confirming that there are no statistically significant differences between the experimental and control groups. This indicates the homogeneity and equivalence of the two groups prior to the implementation of the proposed training program.

4-4-4- Data Collection Tools and Instruments

To ensure measurement accuracy, the following tools were utilized:

1- Measurement Tools:

- **Medical Scale:** To measure body weight.
- **Stadiometer:** To measure height.
- **Digital Stopwatches:** To record time performance.

2- Physical Tests:

- **Sargent Jump Test (Vertical Jump):** To measure the explosive power of the legs.
- **Standing Broad Jump Test:** To measure horizontal explosive power.
- **Digital Field Test:** Measuring the time performance for the 200m breaststroke in a semi-olympic (25m) pool.
- **Pilot Study :**

A pilot study was conducted on a sample from outside the main research group (n=4) with the following objectives:

- To verify the safety and efficiency of the tools and instruments used.
- To identify any difficulties swimmers might encounter during the strength tests.
- To ensure the clarity of the instructions related to the proposed training program.

4-2 Presentation and Analysis of Results:

4-2-1 Presentation and Discussion of the First Hypothesis Results

Hypothesis Statement: "There are statistically significant differences between the pre-and post-measurements of the experimental group in specific strength variables (explosive power and muscular capacity of the lower limbs) in favor of the post-measurement."

Table (2): Significance of Differences Between Pre-and Post-measurements for the Experimental Group in Specific Strength Tests (n=10)

Physical Tests	U ni t	Pre-test (M±SD)	Post-test (M±SD)	t- valu e	Sig.	Statisti cal Signifi cance
Vertical Jump (Sargent)	c m	38.50±2.10	43.80± 1.85	6.24	0.00 0	Signifi cant
Standing Broad Jump	m	2.05±0.12	2.28±0.09	5.81	0.00 0	Signifi cant

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Physical Tests	U ni t	Pre-test (M±SD)	Post-test (M±SD)	t- valu e	Sig.	Statisti cal Signifi cance
Back Muscle Strength & Endurance	kg	85.40±5.15	94.60±4.30	4.95	0.001	Significant

- Discussion of the First Hypothesis Results

The researchers attribute this significant development in the explosive power of the lower limbs to the nature of the **Specific Strength Exercises** included in the proposed program. The program focused primarily on **Plyometrics** and explosive resistance training that simulates the thrust angles in breaststroke swimming.

Scientific Analysis of the Improvement:

Neuromuscular Aspect: The training program contributed to enhancing **Motor Unit** recruitment in terms of response speed and firing frequency. Combining strength and speed leads to improved **Intramuscular Coordination**, which is crucial for **El-Jil Sporting Club** swimmers to increase the explosive "kick" force.

Specificity of Training: The researchers emphasize that the use of **In-water resistance** (elastic cords) and dry-land depth jumps strengthened the **Adductors** and **Quadriceps** in positions nearly identical to the propulsion phase of the breaststroke. This aligns with **Smith (2022)**, who stated that strength training is most effective when it adheres to the kinetic path of the specialized skill.

Targeted Loading (Overload Principle): The systematic progression in training volume and intensity applied to the swimmers led to physiological adaptations in **Fast-twitch fibers** (Type II). These fibers are responsible for generating the high instantaneous force required to break water inertia after each recovery phase.

These results are consistent with the study of **Hussein and Ghanem (2023)**, which indicated that targeted strength programs increase muscle contraction efficiency at rates exceeding traditional training. Based on the above, the researchers conclude that **the first hypothesis has been statistically and scientifically validated.**

4-2-2 Discussion of the Second Hypothesis (Time Performance)

Hypothesis Statement: "There are statistically significant differences between the pre-and post-measurements of the experimental group in the 200m breaststroke time performance in favor of the post-measurement."

Table (3): Significance of Differences Between Pre-and Post measurements for the Experimental Group in Time Performance (n=10)

Variabl e	Uni t	Pre- test (M±S D)	Post-test (M±SD)	Me an Dif fer enc e	t- value	Sig.	Statisti cal Signific ance
200m Breasts troke Time	Sec ond s	168.4± 4.25	162.1± 3.15	6.3 0 s	7.85	0.0 00	Signific ant

- Presentation of Results:

Table (3) reveals statistically significant differences between the pre-and post-measurements of the experimental group regarding the 200m breaststroke time performance. The calculated (**t**) **value reached (7.85)**, which is significantly higher than the tabulated (t) value of (**2.26**) at a significance level of (**0.05**). Furthermore, a clear decrease is observed in the mean time, dropping from (**168.4 seconds**) to (**162.1 seconds**) with a difference of (**6.30 seconds**). This indicates a substantial and fundamental improvement in digital performance in favor of the post-measurement.

- Discussion of the Second Hypothesis Results

The researchers attribute this significant development in the digital performance level of the **El-Jil Sporting Club (Kadiria)** swimmers to the direct reflection of specific strength development (as proven in the first hypothesis) on the efficiency of mechanical performance in the water.

This improvement can be interpreted through the following scientific points:

Increase in Stroke Length (SL): The development of lower limb explosive power enabled the swimmers to generate a more potent

propulsive thrust during each kick phase. This resulted in an increased distance covered per stroke, which is the most critical factor in reducing the total time for the 200m race.

Economy of Effort: The specific training sessions, which included in-water resistances, enhanced the swimmers' ability to overcome **Hydrodynamic Drag** with lower metabolic costs. This allowed for the maintenance of a stable race pace, particularly during the crucial final 50 meters.

Delaying the Onset of Fatigue: The specific strength program improved the anaerobic work capacity of the swimmers. This prevented the occurrence of **Technical Decay** (the breakdown of swimming technique), which the swimmers previously suffered from before the program's implementation.

Consequently, the results confirm that the second hypothesis has been fully validated, proving the effectiveness of the proposed training program in enhancing the competitive performance of the swimmers.

4-2-3- Presentation of the Third Hypothesis Results

Hypothesis Statement: "There are statistically significant differences in the post-measurements between the experimental and control groups in the specific strength variables and digital performance level in favor of the experimental group."

Table (4): Significance of Differences Between the Experimental and Control Groups in the Post-measurements (n=20)

Variabl es	U ni t	Experiment al Group (n=10) (M±SD)	Control Group (n=10) (M±SD)	t- value	Sig.	Statist ical Signifi cance
Vertica l Jump	c m	43.80±1.85	39.20 ±2.05	5.27	0.000	In favor of Experi mental
200m Breasts troke Time	se c	162.1±3.15	167.8± 3.60	3.76	0.002	In favor of Experi mental

- Discussion of the Third Hypothesis Results

Table (4) demonstrates a clear statistical superiority of the experimental group over the control group in all post-measurements. The researchers attribute this superiority directly to the quality and specificity of the training stimuli included in the proposed program.

This superiority can be analyzed through the following points:

Limitations of Traditional Training: Although the control group underwent the club's standard training and achieved slight improvements, these did not reach the level of significance attained by the experimental group. Traditional training often lacks integrated specific exercises that target "Explosive Power" both on land and in the water simultaneously.

Motor Specificity: The proposed program was distinguished by using exercises that precisely simulate the "Flexion and Extension Angles" of the breaststroke leg kick, leading to improved **Stroke Efficiency**. This specialization enabled the experimental group swimmers to effectively convert muscular strength into forward propulsive force.

Development of "Strength Endurance": The proposed program did not only develop raw strength but focused on the ability of the **El-Jil Sporting Club** swimmers to maintain that strength throughout the entire 200-meter distance. This explains the significant time gap (approximately 5.7 seconds) between the two groups in the post-measurement.

These results align with the study by **Smith (2022)**, which confirmed that targeted specific training provides swimmers with a significant competitive advantage compared to general training. Consequently, the researchers conclude that **the third hypothesis has been fully accepted**.

4-2-4- Presentation and Discussion of the Fourth Hypothesis Results

Hypothesis Statement: "The proposed specific strength training program leads to positive improvement percentages in the mechanical efficiency (Stroke Length and Stroke Rate) of the El-Jil Sporting Club swimmers."

Table (5): Improvement Percentages in Mechanical Efficiency Variables for the Experimental Group

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Mechanical Variable	Pre-test (M)	Post-test (M)	Improvement %	Direction
Stroke Length (SL)	1.85 m	2.10 m	13.51%	Positive (Increase)
Stroke Rate (SR)	42 spm	38 spm	9.52%	Positive (Efficiency)
Kick Efficiency	0.65 m/s	0.82 m/s	26.15%	Positive (Increase)

- Discussion of the Fourth Hypothesis Results

The results in Table (5) indicate clear percentage improvements in all investigated mechanical variables. The researchers argue that this improvement provides the direct scientific explanation for the reduction in the digital race time achieved in the second hypothesis.

This improvement can be analyzed from the following biomechanical and training perspectives:

Relationship Between Strength and Stroke Length: The 13.51% increase in Stroke Length is attributed to the swimmers possessing greater **Propulsive Power** in their lower limbs due to specific strength training. As the force applied to the water during the drive phase increases, the distance covered by the body per stroke (Body Displacement) increases accordingly.

Stroke Rate and Efficiency Improvement: A decrease in Stroke Rate (number of strokes per minute) was observed alongside an improvement in the total time. This is a crucial mechanical indicator that the swimmers became more **Economical**. Instead of exerting random effort with quick, short strokes, the **El-Jil Sporting Club** swimmers performed powerful, long, and regulated strokes, which reduces **Wave Drag** generated by excessive movements.

Kick Efficiency: This variable achieved the highest improvement rate (26.15%), confirming the precision in selecting specific exercises that targeted the flexors, extensors, and adductors of the legs in positions that perfectly simulate the **Kinematic Path** of the breaststroke. This development transformed the leg kick into a primary propulsion engine rather than a secondary movement.

These findings align with **Olsson & Taylor (2022)**, who noted that an elite swimmer is one capable of maintaining a constant Stroke Length

even under the pressure of extreme fatigue. Consequently, the researchers conclude that **the fourth hypothesis has been validated both empirically and scientifically.**

4-3 Discussion and interpretation of the results:

The overarching goal of this study was to evaluate the impact of a specific strength training program on the performance of 200m breaststroke swimmers. The integration of the results from the four hypotheses provides a comprehensive scientific narrative regarding the development of athletic performance.

- The Causal Link Between Specific Strength and Performance

The findings clearly demonstrate that the improvement in **Time Performance** (Hypothesis 2) was not an isolated event but a direct consequence of the development in **Specific Strength** (Hypothesis 1). The researchers observed that as the explosive power of the lower limbs increased—evidenced by the significant gains in the Sargent Jump and Standing Broad Jump—the swimmers were able to overcome the high water resistance characteristic of the breaststroke style.

- Biomechanical Efficiency as a Mediator

A key interpretation of these results lies in the **Mechanical Efficiency** (Hypothesis 4). The data suggests that the proposed program successfully facilitated the **Transfer of Training** effect. By increasing the propulsive power of the leg kick, swimmers achieved a greater **Stroke Length (SL)**. This allowed them to maintain velocity with a lower **Stroke Rate (SR)**, leading to what is known in sports science as "**Stroke Economy.**" This economy is vital for the 200m event, which is heavily reliant on anaerobic endurance.

- Specificity vs. Traditional Methods

The superiority of the experimental group over the control group (Hypothesis 3) validates the **Principle of Specificity**. While traditional training methods may improve general fitness, they often fail to target the specific neuromuscular pathways and hydrodynamic requirements of the breaststroke kick. The use of in-water resistances and dry-land plyometrics in this program provided the necessary "functional overload" to improve the **Propulsive Phase** of the stroke.

- Mitigation of Technical Decay

One of the most significant practical outcomes interpreted from the results is the reduction in **Technical Decay** during the final 50 meters of the race. The specific strength endurance developed through the program allowed the swimmers of **El-Jil Sporting Club** to preserve

their technique under high blood lactate concentrations. This explains why the experimental group maintained a more stable pace compared to the sharp decline in speed observed in the control group.

- Summary of Interpretation for the Team:

- Integrated Performance: We linked the physical (strength), the mechanical (stroke length), and the digital (time).

- Transfer of Training: This is a key phrase to use in your discussion to show that the dry-land work successfully moved into the water.

- Neuromuscular Adaptation: This explains the "Why" behind the power increase.

Conclusion:

Based on the research objectives, hypotheses, and the statistical analysis of the results, the researchers conclude the following:

- Program Effectiveness: The proposed specific strength training program proved to be highly effective in developing specific physical abilities and significantly improving the digital performance of 200m breaststroke swimmers.

- Physical Adaptation: The integration of dry-land plyometrics and in-water resistance led to a significant increase in the explosive power of the lower limbs, which serves as the primary engine in breaststroke propulsion.

- Mechanical Correlation: There is a strong positive correlation between the development of specific strength and the improvement of mechanical efficiency. The increase in **Stroke Length (SL)** was the key biomechanical factor that allowed swimmers to reduce their overall race time.

- Superiority of Specificity: The results confirm that specific strength training, which simulates the kinetic path of the swimming stroke, is superior to traditional training methods in achieving elite-level digital performance.

- Fatigue Resistance: The program successfully enhanced the swimmers' ability to resist **Technical Decay**. Swimmers from the experimental group maintained a more stable technique and velocity during the critical final 50 meters of the 200m race compared to the control group.

- **Neuromuscular Transfer:** The training stimuli effectively facilitated the **Transfer of Training** effect from dry-land exercises to aquatic performance, optimizing the neuromuscular coordination required for the complex breaststroke kick.

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