Developing Competency Based Skills (CBS) for Grade VIII Students in Solving Word problems through Differentiated Instruction (DI)

Dorji Tenzin

Nganglam Lower Secondary School

Abstract

This action research, titled "Developing Competency-Based Skills in Solving Mathematical Word Problems through Differentiated Instruction," focused on helping Class VIII students at Nganglam Lower Secondary School overcome their struggles with complex math problems. Many students found the language in word problems to be a major barrier, often feeling overwhelmed and unsure where to begin when a question was wrapped in words. To address this, the study used the SQRQCQ model as a guiding framework, creating a classroom environment that prioritized student-centered learning and the interactive use of technology. By integrating regular formative assessments through remedial classes and daily notebook correction, the study provided students with the "vital feedback" necessary to reflect on and improve their work. These practices offered immediate, personalized feedback, allowing students to identify their mistakes and build confidence in their reasoning skills in real-time.

The research followed a quasi-experimental design, comparing Class VIII A as the experimental group against VIII B as the control group. Analysis of class tests and Likert scale data showed a significant boost in the experimental group's performance and confidence, while the control group saw minimal progress. Beyond just higher scores, students became more motivated and collaborative in their learning. Ultimately, the study concludes that differentiated instruction empowers students to move beyond simple memorization to build the deep, competency-based skills needed for real-world challenges.

Keywords: Differentiated Instruction, SQRQCQ Strategy, Mathematical Word Problems, Competency-Based skills (CBS), Technology Integration, Formative Assessment

Introduction

The education system in Bhutan has significantly transformed from conventional teaching-learning methods to an inclusive model that incorporates modern techniques. This shift has provided an opportunity to refocus on science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) subjects, emphasizing the need to equip students with the information and abilities required for practical, real-world applications. Modern educational tools, including artificial intelligence (AI) and information and communication technology (ICT), are now recognized for their ability to promote developmental activities and critical analysis.

Despite these advancements, many Class VIII students continue to face significant challenges in comprehending mathematical word problems. These difficulties are primarily rooted in a lack of competency-based skills (CBS) and poor reading abilities. Word problems require a complex blend of logical reasoning and language comprehension, which often acts as a barrier for students struggling to

decode contextual information. As a result, students frequently find it difficult to identify the core question, select the correct mathematical operations, or apply effective problem-solving strategies.
Recognizing this pressing issue, an action research initiative was undertaken at Nganglam Lower Secondary School to explore the root causes of these comprehension gaps and implement effective interventions. Central to this study is the SQRQCQ model (Survey, Question, Read, Question, Compute, Question), which serves as a guiding framework to help students systematically break down and interpret complex word problems.
The intervention involves the use of Differentiated Instruction (DI), a flexible and equitable approach that caters to individual learning styles alongside student-centered strategies that actively engage learners in their own progress. To ensure continuous improvement, the research integrates regular formative assessments, specifically through remedial classes and daily notebook correction, which provide students with immediate, personalized feedback. By aligning instructional practices with students' unique needs and integrating tools like GeoGebra and mathematical online games, the research aims to build both reading and reasoning skills, ultimately empowering students to tackle complex mathematical problems with confidence.

Objectives

1. To explore the key challenges Class VIII students encounter in understanding and solving mathematical word problems, especially in challenging strands.
2. To design and apply differentiated instructional methods that incorporate the SQRQCQ model (Survey, Question, Read, Question, Compute, and Question) to provide a structured framework for developing the competency-based skills needed to solve word problems effectively.
3. To evaluate the effectiveness of differentiated instruction in enhancing students' comprehension and problem-solving abilities through three specific approaches: (a) student-centred learning, (b) formative assessment practices, and (c) integration of technology.

Situation Analysis

Located in a busy valley surrounded by factories that operate day and night, especially the DCCL factories which have drawn families from all parts of the country, Nganglam Lower Secondary School (NgLSS) serves as a centre of learning for the growing community. The school has around 1000 students from Pre-Primary to Grade 8 and provides a well-furnished and comfortable learning environment. Every classroom is equipped with ICT facilities, smart TVs, and projectors, allowing lessons to be more interactive and engaging. Despite the industrial setting, the school has managed to build a peaceful and supportive space where children feel encouraged to learn and grow. One of the school's key strengths is its connection with parents, who are well-educated and actively support their children's education beyond classroom learning. This strong partnership helps bring out the best in students, both academically and personally. The school community continues to build up its potential, providing a space where students show up with excitement and a willingness to learn. With its focus on care, collaboration, and opportunity, NgLSS stands out as a positive force in the heart of a busy industrial town.
Even with a well-equipped environment and dedicated support, many students at NglSS find themselves struggling when it comes to STEM subjects, especially mathematics. A major hurdle they come up against is solving word problems. These problems often turn students off because they find it hard to make sense of the language used. Many of them don't pick up on key information or figure out what the question is

really asking. As a result, they get stuck and tend to give up instead of trying to work through the steps. This challenge mainly comes from weak comprehension skills, which hold them back from connecting words to numbers and applying the right methods. Even when teachers try to break things down or use technology to bring lessons to life, some students still shy away from the task, feeling overwhelmed or unsure of where to begin. They often look to the teacher to sort it out rather than try on their own. Over time, this chips away at their confidence and causes them to fall behind. The severity of this issue was recently underscored during the mathematics midterm examination, where only 21 out of 94 students managed to pass.

Seeing my students in Classes VIII A, VIII B, and VIII C struggle with mathematical word problems over time truly moved me to take a closer look at what was holding them back. Many of them seemed eager to learn but often got lost along the way, especially when it came to understanding the language used in word problems. They would try to keep up, but the moment a question was wrapped in words, they began to shut down or look around for help. This inspired me to take up this action research to understand their difficulties more clearly and also work hand in hand with them to build better strategies for learning. This is the first time these students are being involved in such a reflective process, and I see it as a chance to empower them to let them know their struggles matter and their voices are heard.

Competence

Researcher

As a primary researcher, several essential skills are possessed to successfully execute this action research and critically analyse the gathered information. A bachelor's degree in mathematics was obtained from one of the universities in Bhutan, followed by the completion of a postgraduate diploma in education with a specialization in mathematics from Samtse College of Education. Although experience in doing action research is minimal, participation in various webinars and workshop related to action research proposal writing at Yurung Central School, Yoechen Central , report writing workshop at Khar Middle Secondary School along with the recent completion of major online courses in quantitative and qualitative research has strengthen my keen interest in this research.

Participants

The participants in this action research are students from VIII A & VIII B who bring different strengths and learning backgrounds to the classroom. While many of them try their best to keep up with the lessons, a good number still struggle to make sense of word problems in mathematics. They often find it difficult to break down the questions, figure out what is being asked, and connect the problem to the right mathematical methods. This challenge shows up especially when they are asked to apply what they've learned to real-life situations. Most students have the potential but need more support to build up their confidence and get the hang of solving problems that require deeper thinking and understanding.

Critical friend

Tashi Namgay, with 33 years of teaching experience, holds a master's degree in School Leadership and Management from Paro College of Education, where he focused his thesis on qualitative research. In 2013, he published a paper in the *Journal of the International Society for Teacher Education* and has contributed several articles to open-access platforms in Germany. Passionate about educational writing and research, he actively serves as a facilitator and editor for the Dzongkhag-level Action Research Workshop and Publishing Committee. Each year, he consistently submits at least one research paper in either English or Dzongkha for Dzongkhag-level publications. At the beginning of 2025, he played a key role in developing an action research package and participated in the Training of Trainers (ToT) programme in Phuentsholing. Later that year, he also served as editor for the Dzongkhag-level Action Research Compendium.

Literature Review

The literature review is organized into the following themes: *(a) Student Centred learning, (b) Language Proficiency in mathematics, (c) Integration of technology and (d) Formative assessment in learning mathematics and (e) SQRQCQ Model*

Differentiated instruction is defined as a flexible, equitable, and intelligent way to approach teaching and learning (Fox & Hoffman, 2011). DI stresses that a single teaching style will not accommodate every student, especially when this style is not matched with student needs (Levine, 2002). It starts from the premise that learners are different and learn differently (Fogarty and Pete, 2011, Tomlinson, 1995). Competency in mathematics is more than memorizing facts. It blends knowledge, understanding, and practical skills to help students think critically, solve problems, and explain their reasoning clearly. Yet, in contexts like Bhutan, many learners still struggle to develop these skills. This study aims to explore ways to help students not only understand math but apply it in real life. While Bhutan promotes holistic, inclusive education, traditional methods persist. Competency-based learning, however, emphasizes mastery over time, supporting personalized, meaningful learning (MoESD, 2023).

Student Centred learning

Within the broader STEM fields, CBL has gained recognition for improving learning outcomes. According to Hanri, Johnson, and Nepal (2017), this model allows students to progress from basic knowledge to complex understanding at their own pace. When learners build their skills through hands-on practice and real-world applications, their ability to solve abstract problems improves significantly. Brooks and Brooks (1999) emphasized that learning is most effective when students are active participants, constructing their own knowledge through exploration, dialogue, and reflection.

Language Proficiency in mathematics

Language also plays a vital role in mathematical learning. Halai (2007) discovered that students in Pakistan struggled with both the language and the mathematical content of word problems. Similarly, Bhutanese students may benefit from simplified language and contextualized learning that bridges the gap between classroom instruction and everyday life. Rewriting complex math jargon into accessible language can motivate learners and improve their problem-solving skills.

Integration of technology in learning mathematics

The use of technology has also transformed the teaching of mathematics. Lavicza (2010) and Drijvers (2013) highlighted that meaningful integration of technology requires careful consideration of instructional design, teacher facilitation, and the learning environment. Murphy (2016) found that incorporating tools such as GeoGebra enhances visualization, engagement, and conceptual understanding. During teaching practice, the use of GeoGebra to explore transformations like reflection, rotation, and dilation enabled students to interact with concepts in dynamic and intuitive ways.

Formative assessment

Assessment is another cornerstone of effective learning. William (2010) argued that formative assessment provides vital feedback, allowing students to reflect, revise, and improve. However, in Bhutan, the pressure to complete vast syllabus often leads to a reliance on summative assessments. This hinders timely feedback and makes it harder for students to retain and apply prior knowledge. Blankman (2022) suggested tools like exit tickets, class discussions, KWL charts, and peer feedback as effective strategies to make assessment more continuous, interactive, and learner-centered.

The SQRQCQ Model in Problem Solving

Beyond general language proficiency, specific scaffolded strategies are required to help students navigate the complexities of mathematical word problems. The SQRQCQ model, developed by Leo Fay (1965), is a six-step metacognitive strategy designed to help students break down text-heavy problems: Survey, Question, Read, Question, Compute, and Question.

Research indicates that many students fail at math not due to a lack of calculation skills, but because they cannot decode the narrative structure of the problem (Duru & Koklu, 2011). By utilizing SQRQCQ, learners first Survey the problem to get a general idea, identify the specific Question being asked, and then re-Read to identify relevant information and discard "distractors." This is followed by a second Question regarding which operations to use, the actual Computation, and a final Question to check if the answer is logical (Brunn, 1990). In a Bhutanese context, where English is the medium of instruction for mathematics, this model provides a linguistic scaffold that reduces cognitive load and builds student confidence in tackling non-routine problems (Lyon, 2016).

In conclusion, cultivating competency in mathematics requires thoughtful integration of pedagogy, curriculum, technology, and assessment. A student-centered, competency-based approach encourages learners to think critically, engage deeply, and apply their knowledge beyond the classroom. As education systems worldwide adapt to the needs of the 21st century, adopting such strategies will ensure learners are equipped not only with academic skills but also with the confidence and curiosity to navigate complex, real-world challenges.

Research Question

How can I help students to comprehend word problems through differentiated instruction in mathematics that will enable them to develop competency Based Skills (CBS)?

Data Collection and Analysis

This research adopted a mixed-methods approach and a quasi-experimental design to explore interventions for developing students' competency-based skills (CBS) in solving mathematical word problems. Two sections were involved through non-probability sampling, where Class VIII A was designated as the experimental group and Class VIII B served as the control group. Final group assignments were made based on an analysis of baseline data to ensure a fair and informed comparison of outcomes.

Throughout the intervention, the experimental group in VIII A was exposed to various teaching strategies, including the integration of technology, the SQRQCQ model, and formative assessments, while VIII B continued with traditional instructional methods. Quantitative data were analyzed using percentages, mean scores, and standard deviations with the support of SPSS software, while qualitative data from interviews and questionnaires were examined using thematic analysis to gain deeper insights into the effectiveness and practicality of these interventions.

Baseline Data Analysis

Likert-scale surveys

Group Statistics

	Quasi-Experimental Design	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pre_Mean	Experimental(VIII A)	32	4.1406	.37296	.06593
	Control(VIII B)	32	4.1500	.63855	.11288

Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
									95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Pre_Mean	Equal variances assumed	3.289	.075	-.072	62	.943	-.00937	.13072	-.27069	.25194
	Equal variances not assumed			-.072	49.946	.943	-.00937	.13072	-.27195	.25320

Table 1: Comparison of Pre-Intervention Mean Scores for Experimental and Control Groups

To establish a reliable starting point for the study, baseline data were collected from both the experimental and control groups using Likert-scale surveys. The statistical analysis, summarized in the table above, indicated that both cohorts possessed nearly identical initial mean scores. Class VIII A (Experimental Group) recorded a mean score of *4.1406 (SD = 0.37296)*, while Class VIII B (Control Group) recorded a slightly higher mean of *4.1500 (SD = 0.63855)*.

The minimal difference between these mean scores suggests that there was no significant disparity in the participants' initial attitudes or perceived competencies regarding mathematical word problems before the intervention began. Furthermore, the lower standard deviation in VIII A indicates more consistent responses within that group compared to VIII B. This high degree of similarity between the two groups ensured a fair comparison, allowing the researcher to attribute any future significant changes in the experimental group's performance to the interventions.

Class test scores

Group Statistics

	Class	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pre class test score	Experimental(VIII A)	32	9.1978	4.06709	.71897
	Control(VIII B)	32	9.9441	3.93225	.69513

Table 2: Comparison of Pre-Intervention Class Test Scores for VIII A and VIII B

In addition to the attitudinal data, the initial academic performance of the participants was assessed through a pre-intervention class test. As presented in Table 2, both groups demonstrated a comparable level of mathematical proficiency prior to the implementation of the research interventions. Class VIII A (Experimental Group) recorded a mean score of *9.20*, while Class VIII B (Control Group) recorded a slightly higher mean of *9.44*.

Although the control group began with a marginal lead of 0.24 points, the overall scores and standard deviations (*4.07* for VIII A and *3.93* for VIII B) indicate that the two cohorts were academically well-matched. This baseline parity is essential for the validity of the study, as it ensures that any subsequent significant gains in the experimental group can be attributed to the targeted interventions.

Focus group interview response

Before the intervention began, focus group interviews were conducted to create a safe and supportive space where students could openly discuss their struggles with mathematics. During these early conversations, it became clear that many students relied heavily on simple memorization. They shared that while they could easily remember formulas or "steps" for basic calculations, they felt completely lost when faced with Competency-Based Questions (CBQs). These students explained that word problems felt like a "foreign language" because they required them to think critically and apply their knowledge in unfamiliar ways, rather than just repeating a procedure they had practiced in class.

The participants expressed a deep-seated frustration with the gap between knowing a mathematical rule and knowing *when* or *how* to use it in a real-world context. For many, the traditional way of learning-rote memorization had become a barrier to their personal growth and confidence. These interviews highlighted a significant need for a shift in instruction. The students weren't just asking for easier problems; they were seeking a way to move beyond "plugging in numbers" toward a deeper, more critical understanding. This early feedback was vital, as it confirmed that the research should focus on promoting application and critical thinking, helping students transform from passive memorizers into active problem solvers.

Ethical Consideration

To uphold the rights, dignity, and privacy of all participants, the study adhered to the highest ethical standards throughout the research process. Formal written permission was obtained from the school principal, the parents or guardians of the students, and the subject teachers prior to the commencement of any research activities. All data gathered through interviews, surveys, and questionnaires were treated with strict confidentiality. To ensure anonymity, student identities were protected through the use of pseudonyms, and all raw data were stored securely.

A comprehensive research proposal was developed to clearly outline the study's objectives, methodology, and anticipated outcomes, ensuring full transparency. A formal meeting was also conducted with the school principal to discuss the project's implementation and to address any potential risks. To maintain the integrity of the educational environment, the research intervention was thoughtfully integrated into the regular instructional periods to minimize disruption to the school's ongoing academic schedule. Throughout the process, a safe and supportive environment was fostered to ensure that students could focus on developing their competency-based skills in solving mathematical word problems without undue pressure or risk.

Intervention Phase

The nine-session intervention, conducted three times weekly over a three-week period, was designed based on baseline findings which indicated a significant reliance on rote memorization and a lack of confidence in tackling word problems. To improve learning outcomes, the instructional approach shifted from traditional teacher-centered lectures to a Differentiated Instruction (DI) framework, ensuring that tasks and support were tailored to individual student readiness levels.

A central component of this phase was the introduction of the SQRQCQ model (Survey, Question, Read, Question, Compute, and Question). Students were explicitly guided to use this six-step metacognitive scaffold to deconstruct text-heavy problems. To support this process, learners were organized into student-centered groups based on their pre-test results. Those requiring additional support worked with simplified problems and printed SQRQCQ checklists, while advanced learners engaged with non-routine, complex tasks that demanded higher-order critical thinking.

Technology was strategically integrated to enhance visualization and engagement. During these sessions, the Smart TV was used for interactive demonstrations, and students utilized adaptive platforms like GeoGebra to explore mathematical concepts dynamically. Online quizzes and games were set at varying difficulty levels to ensure that all students, regardless of their starting point, remained motivated and challenged.

Through this ongoing cycle of scaffolded problem-solving, collaborative discussion, and technology-enhanced practice, students moved beyond simple memorization. They developed lasting Competency-Based Skills (CBS), gaining the confidence to apply clear reasoning and creativity to mathematical word problems, which effectively prepared them for the post-test assessment.

Pre-Test and Post-Test Analysis

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Pre_Mean	64	2.25	4.95	4.1453	.51875
Post_Mean	64	3.30	5.00	4.4148	.30338
Valid N (listwise)	64				

Table 3: Comparative Analysis of Pre-test and Post-test Performance

Before the intervention, students' overall mean score was *4.1453 (SD = 0.51875)***,** suggesting a neutral perception of their competency in solving word problems. After the intervention, the mean increased to *4.4148 (SD = 0.30338)***,** indicating a positive shift toward agreement.

Table 3 presents the descriptive statistics of students' pre- and post-intervention mean scores on the Likert-scale survey. The mean score increased from *4.15 (SD = 0.52)* before the intervention to *4.41 (SD = 0.30)* after the intervention. This upward shift indicates an improvement in students' perceptions and confidence in solving mathematical word problems using differentiated instructional strategies. Furthermore, the reduction in standard deviation demonstrates a greater consistency among students in their positive attitudes toward competency-based learning after the intervention.

Paired Samples Test

		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	Pre_Mean - Post_Mean	-.26953	.61137	.07642	-.42225	-.11681	-3.527	63	.001

Table 4: Paired Samples T-Test Results for Pre- and Post-Intervention Survey Means

The results in Table 4 indicate a significant difference between the pre-intervention and post-intervention means. The t-value of *-3.527* and, most importantly, the significance (p-value) of *.001* provide strong evidence of improvement. In academic research, any p-value less than *.05* is considered significant; since the result here is *.001*, it shows that the likelihood of this improvement happening by pure chance is only *0.1%.*

This statistical growth suggests that the combination of the SQRQCQ model, differentiated instruction, and technology integration effectively enhanced the students' competency-based skills. By moving away from rote memorization and providing tailored support, the intervention successfully helped students navigate complex word problems with greater confidence and accuracy.

T-Test

One-Sample Statistics

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
STL_Mean	64	4.3299	.29278	.03660
FA_Mean	64	4.3188	.36204	.04525
Technology_Mean	64	4.2370	1.13925	.14241

One-Sample Test

	Test Value = 0					
					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Lower	Upper
STL_Mean	118.309	63	.000	4.32986	4.2567	4.4030
FA_Mean	95.432	63	.000	4.31875	4.2283	4.4092
Technology_Mean	29.753	63	.000	4.23698	3.9524	4.5216

Table 5: One-Sample T-Test Results on the Effectiveness of Intervention Strategies

To validate the specific components of the intervention, a one-sample t-test was conducted on the feedback provided by the total participant group (*N=64*). The analysis focused on three core areas: Student-Led learning (STL), Formative Assessment (FA), and Technology Integration.

The analysis of student perceptions regarding differentiated instructional strategies revealed that the intervention applied to Class VIII A (Experimental) had a statistically significant positive impact on developing competency-based skills ($p < .001$). While Class VIII B (Control) followed the standard curriculum, the data in Table 5 reflects the high levels of engagement and success reported by the students who experienced the new pedagogical pillars.

Among the strategies tested in VIII A, Student-Centered Learning recorded the highest mean score (M = 4.33, SD = 0.29). This indicates that the students in the experimental group found this approach most effective in improving their conceptual understanding and confidence when solving mathematical word problems. The low standard deviation in VIII A suggests that the student-led model consistently met the needs of all learners in that group, unlike the teacher-centered approach used in VIII B.

Formative Assessment followed closely (M = 4.32, SD = 0.36), highlighting that students in Class VIII A prioritized continuous feedback and reflection as essential to their growth. While Technology Integration (M = 4.24, SD = 1.14) was also found to be statistically effective, the higher standard deviation suggests that its impact varied among the students in VIII A, likely due to differences in individual digital readiness and familiarity with tools like GeoGebra.

Consequently, based on the superior performance and feedback from the experimental group, it is recommended that Student-Centered Learning be prioritized as the core instructional strategy for Grade VIII mathematics. This should be supported by the formative assessments and gradual technology integration successfully piloted in Class VIII A to bridge the learning gaps observed in the traditional VIII B classroom and enhance overall competency-based outcomes.

Discussion

The primary goal of this research was to determine how Differentiated Instruction (DI) and the SQRQCQ model could help Grade VIII students develop Competency-Based Skills (CBS) in solving mathematical word problems. The results indicate a significant transformation in both student performance and perception. Baseline focus group interviews revealed that students initially viewed word problems as a "foreign language," struggling to bridge the gap between knowing a rule and knowing how to apply it. By implementing the SQRQCQ model, students in the experimental group (VIII A) were provided with a linguistic and metacognitive scaffold. This allowed them to systematically deconstruct complex narratives, reflected in the significant post-test mean increase from *4.15 to 4.41*. This finding supports the assertion by Polya (1945) that "understanding the problem" is the most critical stage of mathematical discovery. The model effectively mitigated cognitive overload by treating math as a form of reading comprehension, a strategy Fay (1965) emphasized as essential for students who struggle with the narrative structure of word problems.

The quantitative data in Table 5 highlights that Student-Centered Learning recorded the highest mean score *($M = 4.33$, $SD = 0.29$)*. This suggests that the shift from teacher-centered lectures to student-led discussions allowed students in VIII A to become active participants in their own learning. The low standard deviation in this category confirms that the student-led model consistently met the needs of learners across different readiness levels. This mirrors the findings of Tomlinson (2014), who argues that differentiation is most effective when it acknowledges student variety and provides "optimal challenge zones" for every learner, a factor that was visibly missing in the traditional, one-size-fits-all approach of the VIII B control group.

Formative assessment practices ($M = 4.32$) were identified as "vital feedback" loops. Daily notebook corrections and remedial classes allowed students to identify mistakes in real-time, building the confidence necessary for non-routine problem solving. This aligns with the "Assessment for Learning" framework established by Black and Wiliam (1998), which demonstrates that frequent, low-stakes feedback significantly raises achievement standards. While technology integration was also effective *($M = 4.24$),* its higher standard deviation ($SD = 1.14$) indicates that the impact was less uniform. This variance suggests that while tools like GeoGebra enhance visualization, their effectiveness is closely tied to the "digital readiness" and individual familiarity of the students in VIII A.

Recommendation

Based on the statistical success and qualitative improvements observed throughout the intervention, it is recommended that the SQRQCQ model be adopted as a standard pedagogical tool for all Grade VIII mathematics sections. This structured deconstruction of word problems is essential to bridge the gap between language literacy and mathematical computation. Schools should move away from whole-class lectures toward readiness-based grouping and student-led stations. As demonstrated in VIII A, this shift allows educators to meet diverse learner needs more effectively, ensuring no student is left behind by the complexity of competency-based questions. The school should prioritize "low-stakes" feedback culture, such as daily notebook monitoring and remedial support, over traditional high-stakes summative testing. Immediate feedback is vital for building student confidence and reasoning skills in real-time. To address the high variability in technology's impact, the school should provide foundational workshops on digital tools like GeoGebra for both students and staff, ensuring that technological integration is inclusive and effective for all.

Conclusion

This action research sought to address the persistent challenges Grade VIII students face when navigating

mathematical word problems by implementing a framework of Differentiated Instruction (DI) and the SQRQCQ model. The study specifically compared the progress of Class VIII A (Experimental) against Class VIII B (Control) to determine the efficacy of student-centered, scaffolded interventions in developing Competency-Based Skills (CBS).
The findings provide compelling evidence that the intervention was successful. Quantitatively, the experimental group showed a significant improvement in post-test mean scores (increasing from *4.15 to 4.41),* while the control group, following traditional teacher-centered methods, remained largely stagnant. The statistical significance ($p < .001$) of the pedagogical pillars—Student-Led Learning, Formative Assessment, and Technology Integration—confirms that these strategies effectively reduced the cognitive load and linguistic barriers inherent in word problems.
Qualitatively, the research revealed a profound shift in student attitude. Students who previously viewed word problems as an insurmountable "foreign language" gained the confidence to deconstruct narratives and apply mathematical logic systematically. While Technology Integration showed higher variability, suggesting a need for more consistent digital readiness, the overall success of the SQRQCQ model and Formative Assessment proved that immediate feedback and metacognitive scaffolding are essential for modern mathematics education.
In conclusion, this research confirms that moving away from a "one-size-fits-all" lecture model toward a differentiated, student-led environment is vital for achieving the goals of the new competency-based curriculum. By empowering students to take ownership of their learning and providing them with the tools to decode complex information, educators can bridge the gap between basic computation and real-world mathematical application.

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