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Computation in Context: A Comparison of Fraction Story Problems and Symbolic Arithmetic

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Abstract

Fraction arithmetic is an essential skill for students to advance to higher level math, but it is also important for daily life. The current study examines how sixth grade students with math learning difficulties perform on symbolic arithmetic problems and analogous word problems to determine what makes some fraction arithmetic easier for students to solve when given symbolic notation, and others easier to solve when problems are embedded in word problem contexts. We found that students make similar errors on both symbolic arithmetic problems and word problems, and they also struggle to identify the correct operation for a word problem.