

Research Article

Development of an Interactive E-Module Based on Inquiry Learning for Calculus Derivative Topics in Higher Education

Lilla Puji Lestari^{1*}, Gregorio Antony Bani², Raveenthiran Vivekanantharasa³

1 Universitas Maarif Hasyim Latif, Indonesia, lilla_puji_lestari@dosen.umaha.ac.id

2 Universitas Aryasatya Deo Muri, Indonesia

3 The Open University of Sri Lanka, Sri Lanka, rvive@ou.ac.lk

* Corresponding Author: e-mail : lilla_puji_lestari@dosen.umaha.ac.id

Abstract: This research investigates the development and testing of an interactive e-module based on inquiry learning, designed to improve students' understanding of derivatives in calculus. The study adopts a Research and Development (R&D) approach, which involves several stages: design, prototype creation, testing, and revision. The e-module incorporates interactive exercises, real-time feedback, and multimedia elements to engage students in active learning. A pre- and post-test assessment was conducted to measure the effectiveness of the e-module, revealing a 20% improvement in students' conceptual understanding of derivatives. Feedback from students indicated that the e-module's interactive features, including visual representations, problem-solving activities, and immediate corrections, significantly enhanced their learning experience. The results were compared with traditional printed materials, showing that the interactive e-module was more effective in improving students' problem-solving skills and overall understanding of abstract concepts in calculus. The findings suggest that technology-enhanced tools, such as interactive e-modules, offer a promising approach to calculus education, fostering deeper engagement and providing immediate feedback, which traditional methods fail to offer. These tools are particularly beneficial in bridging the gap between theoretical understanding and practical application in higher education. The study also recommends expanding the use of inquiry-based learning and interactive modules to other areas of mathematics and STEM education. Future research should focus on refining the e-module to include more personalized learning pathways and explore its long-term effects on students' performance across various subjects.

Keywords: Calculus Derivatives; Conceptual Understanding; Educational Technology; Inquiry Learning; Interactive E-Modules

Received: July 26, 2024

Revised: August 10, 2024

Accepted: August 24, 2024

Published: August 30, 2024

Curr. Ver.: August 30, 2024



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1. Introduction

Understanding the concept of derivatives in calculus is a significant challenge for many university students, primarily due to the abstract nature of the material. Derivatives, as fundamental components of calculus, are essential for various applications in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields. However, students often struggle to grasp both the conceptual and practical aspects of derivatives, particularly when it comes to tasks such as sketching graphs of derivatives and understanding their relationship to the original functions. This difficulty in understanding derivatives is particularly prevalent in introductory calculus courses and can hinder students' ability to apply mathematical principles effectively in real-world problems (Mutia, Zaenuri, & Wardono, 2021; Velichová, 2020).

The traditional teaching methods employed in many mathematics courses, which often rely on rote learning and manual calculations, may not address the cognitive challenges associated with learning derivatives. These methods typically emphasize algebraic manipulation and theoretical proofs, but they lack sufficient visual aids or context to help students visualize and internalize these abstract concepts. As a result, many students struggle with connecting theoretical knowledge to practical applications, which can lead to disengagement and a lack of deep understanding (Wong, Mahmud, & Wong, 2025; Zha, 2022). Without interactive or engaging teaching strategies, students may become passive learners, missing the opportunity to engage critically with the material and develop problem-solving skills (Khor, Chua, & Lim, 2020).

Given these challenges, there is a growing need for innovative teaching tools that can enhance student learning and help overcome the difficulties associated with abstract mathematical concepts like derivatives. Recent advancements in educational technology, including the use of dynamic geometry software, AI tools, and multimedia courseware, have shown promise in making complex concepts more accessible and engaging. Tools such as Geometer's Sketchpad and MATLAB have been utilized to help students visualize mathematical concepts through interactive simulations, reducing cognitive load and making learning more intuitive (Wong, Wong, & Mohd Ayub, 2020). Moreover, AI-powered systems can provide immediate feedback and tailored learning experiences, helping students to gain a deeper understanding of the material (Wong et al., 2025).

Innovative teaching approaches that incorporate technology offer significant benefits, including the ability to present mathematical concepts from multiple perspectives. This multimodal approach can support different learning styles and foster independent thinking and analytical skills, essential for mastering complex topics such as derivatives. By creating a more interactive and supportive learning environment, these tools not only facilitate understanding but also help bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application, ultimately improving student learning outcomes (Chen, 2022). The integration of such technologies into higher education can transform how students engage with challenging mathematical topics, offering them opportunities for deeper understanding and greater academic success.

In higher education, many students struggle to grasp the abstract nature of calculus, particularly the concept of derivatives. Traditional teaching methods often fall short in addressing the diverse learning needs of students, particularly in STEM subjects like mathematics. The need for innovative and interactive tools to enhance learning in these fields is increasingly recognized. One promising solution is the development of interactive e-modules, which offer technology-enhanced, student-centered learning experiences. The primary objective of this research is to design and test an interactive e-module based on inquiry learning to improve students' conceptual understanding of calculus derivative topics.

The integration of technology into education has been shown to improve student engagement and learning outcomes significantly. Various studies have explored the effectiveness of e-modules across different mathematical topics, with positive results in enhancing student performance and understanding. For instance, interactive e-content modules have proven effective in improving high school students' performance in achievement tests in mathematics (Prabakaran & Saravanakumar, 2020). Similarly, inquiry-based e-modules have shown significant improvements in learning outcomes in geometry for primary school teacher education students (Triwahyuningtyas & Suastika, 2020). These findings highlight the potential of e-modules to transform how students engage with challenging mathematical content.

In addition to their effectiveness in mathematics, e-modules grounded in differentiated instruction and the theory of didactical situations have been shown to improve student

engagement and conceptual understanding in primary mathematics education. The inquiry-based learning (IBL) approach, which emphasizes student exploration and questioning, has been found to enhance student awareness of the learning process, thereby addressing common difficulties in calculus courses (Shelton, 2017). Inquiry-based modules encourage students to take a more active role in their learning, thus fostering deeper engagement with the material.

The development of Android-based interactive e-modules for various mathematical topics, such as trigonometry, has demonstrated high validity and effectiveness in enhancing student motivation and learning outcomes (Asmianto, Rahmadani, Pusawidjayanti, & Wahyuningsih, 2022). Moreover, problem-based e-modules in calculus courses have been validated and found to be practical tools for improving students' numeracy literacy skills (Apriandi, Murtafiah, Suprpto, Masfingatin, & Lusiana, 2024). These studies suggest that e-modules, when designed with pedagogical frameworks such as inquiry-based learning, can provide an engaging and effective alternative to traditional teaching methods.

Research methodologies such as experimental design and design-based research have demonstrated the superiority of e-learning platforms over conventional teaching methods in enhancing students' mathematical skills (Alzubi, 2022; Misbah et al., 2024). Design-based research, which involves iterative development and refinement of educational tools based on feedback and testing, has proven effective in developing e-modules that meet students' learning needs (Shelton, 2017).

This research aims to leverage these findings by designing and testing an inquiry-based interactive e-module to enhance students' understanding of calculus derivatives. By integrating technology into the learning process, this e-module seeks to provide an engaging and effective learning environment that fosters conceptual understanding and problem-solving skills.

2. Literature Review

The Concept of Derivatives in Calculus

Derivatives are a fundamental concept in calculus, playing a pivotal role in understanding rates of change, limits, and functions. A derivative measures the rate of change of a function at any given point, making it essential for analyzing physical phenomena involving variations and changes (Mutia & Wardono, 2021; Feudel & Biehler, 2021). The importance of derivatives in higher education, especially in STEM fields, cannot be overstated, as they form the basis for more advanced topics in mathematics and their applications in various scientific domains (Rosenbaum, 2018; Shelton, 2017). Mastery of the concept is critical not only for success in calculus but also for understanding other disciplines, such as physics, engineering, and economics, where dynamic systems and change are central themes (Weigand, 2014).

Educational Significance of Derivatives

In higher education, particularly in STEM fields, a strong conceptual understanding of derivatives is vital. Understanding derivatives is not only necessary for solving mathematical problems but is also foundational for later courses in mathematics and its practical applications in science and technology (Jones & Watson, 2018). Students' ability to grasp the concept of derivatives is a prerequisite for engaging in advanced coursework, where the derivative concept extends into areas like differential equations, optimization, and mathematical modeling (Hashemi et al., 2015; Prihandhika et al., 2022). Furthermore, mastery of derivatives enhances students' problem-solving abilities, which is crucial for their academic and professional success in these fields (Zehra & Abbasi, 2019).

Teaching Approaches for Derivatives

Effective teaching strategies for derivatives focus on making the abstract concept more accessible to students. Various pedagogical approaches, including real-world contexts,

graphical representations, and digital technologies, can significantly improve students' understanding of derivatives. Using tools such as Desmos, for instance, helps students visualize derivatives and explore their relationships with functions (Rosenbaum, 2018; Feudel & Biehler, 2021). Visual tools allow students to see how derivatives represent rates of change and instantaneous slopes, providing a more intuitive understanding of the concept (Zambrano, Ávila, & Medrano, 2019). Embodied design and inquiry-based learning have also shown promise in enhancing students' intuitive understanding of derivatives by making the learning experience more interactive (Rosenbaum, 2018; Shelton, 2017). These methods shift the focus from passive learning to active, student-centered exploration, allowing students to engage with the material more deeply.

Challenges in Learning Derivatives

Despite the importance of derivatives in mathematics education, many students face significant challenges in understanding this concept. One of the primary issues is the abstract nature of derivatives, which often leads students to view them simply as procedural tools rather than appreciating their deeper theoretical significance (Mutia & Wardono, 2021; Rosenbaum, 2018). This superficial understanding makes it difficult for students to apply derivatives in practical contexts and impedes their ability to solve more complex problems that require a solid grasp of the concept (Zehra & Abbasi, 2019). Additionally, students often encounter problems in connecting derivatives to their graphical representations, making it harder for them to relate the mathematical formalism to real-world phenomena (Moru, 2020; Hamid et al., 2021).

Another significant challenge is related to misconceptions about derivatives, particularly in relation to integration techniques, which are often confused by students (Zehra & Abbasi, 2019). This confusion is further compounded by weaknesses in problem-solving skills, as many students struggle to apply their knowledge of derivatives to solve real-world problems effectively (Mkhatshwa, 2024; Weigand, 2014). To address these challenges, it is essential to adopt instructional strategies that provide students with a deeper conceptual understanding of derivatives and their applications.

Educational Design and Approaches to Address Challenges

Traditional teaching methods often fail to address these challenges effectively, as they focus on step-by-step procedures without providing students with the context or visual aids needed to understand the underlying concepts. A more discrete, step-by-step approach, along with varied representations-graphical, algebraic, and numerical-can help students better understand derivatives and their applications (Weigand, 2014). a.) Graphical representation allows students to visualize how the derivative of a function corresponds to the slope of the tangent line at any given point, providing an intuitive understanding of rates of change and the relationship between a function and its derivative curve. b.) Algebraic representation involves expressing derivatives symbolically using differentiation rules and formulas, helping students understand the procedural and analytical aspects of finding derivatives. c.) Numerical representation focuses on approximating derivatives using numerical methods, such as calculating the rate of change between two points or using difference quotients, which helps students connect theoretical definitions to computational practice.

Implementing technology-enhanced approaches, such as interactive e-modules and inquiry-based learning, offers a promising solution to these challenges by allowing students to engage actively with the material and develop a more intuitive understanding of derivatives. These digital tools can dynamically combine graphical, algebraic, and numerical perspectives-helping learners visualize, calculate, and interpret derivatives interactively, thus deepening conceptual comprehension.

Inquiry-Based Learning in Education

Inquiry-Based Learning (IBL) is an educational approach that emphasizes student-centered learning through exploration, questioning, and problem-solving. It shifts the focus from traditional instructor-led teaching to a more active, learner-driven process of knowledge construction (Shah, 2021; Lower-Hoppe, Brgoch, Chen, & Sutherland, 2020). The core principle of IBL is rooted in social constructivism, which posits that knowledge is constructed through social interactions and hands-on experiences. This approach encourages students to develop their own understanding by engaging deeply with content, rather than merely receiving information passively (Shah, 2021; Probine et al., 2024).

IBL can be implemented through various methods such as problem-based, project-based, and case-based learning. These methods have been shown to enhance students' critical thinking skills and ability to apply knowledge in practical contexts (Lower-Hoppe et al., 2020). The emphasis on inquiry promotes a deeper engagement with the subject matter, which fosters the development of problem-solving abilities and higher-order thinking skills. However, the implementation of IBL also presents certain challenges, including the need for significant instructor support and the development of students' information literacy skills (McKinney, 2014; Probine et al., 2024).

Previous Research on the Effectiveness of Inquiry Learning in Mathematics Education

IBL has been shown to be particularly effective in mathematics education, as it fosters a deeper conceptual understanding and improves students' problem-solving skills. For example, a study on middle school students found that IBL significantly enhanced their reasoning skills in mathematics, particularly in topics like algebra (Şen, Sonay, & Güler, 2021). In another study, Grade 9 students in an IBL environment outperformed those in traditional classrooms in terms of conceptual understanding and problem-solving abilities, although the improvement was not as pronounced in procedural knowledge (Şen et al., 2021). This highlights the potential of IBL to improve students' mathematical reasoning while also emphasizing the importance of pedagogical strategies that promote active student engagement and exploration.

Effective implementation of IBL in mathematics education, however, requires well-prepared teachers who are confident in using these methods. Professional development programs are essential for enhancing teachers' readiness and self-efficacy in delivering IBL effectively. Studies have demonstrated that teachers who received training in inquiry-based methods showed significant improvements in their ability to implement IBL in the classroom (Rongbutsri et al., 2018; McKinney, 2014).

Interactive E-Modules in Education

The integration of technology into education has been instrumental in enhancing student engagement and learning outcomes. Interactive e-modules, in particular, offer a flexible and engaging way to support students' learning. These e-modules have been shown to improve student performance and foster greater engagement. For example, Moodle-assisted e-modules have led to higher post-test scores and improved numeracy literacy among elementary students (Rongbutsri et al., 2018). In medical education, interactive PowerPoint-based e-modules have been used to enhance students' comprehension and application of knowledge, showing significant improvements in learning outcomes (Esquela-Kerscher et al., 2016).

E-modules provide students with the flexibility to learn at their own pace and convenience, which is particularly beneficial in overcoming the limitations of traditional classroom settings. This flexibility allows for a more personalized learning experience, which is essential for diverse learners with varying academic backgrounds and learning styles

(Rongbuttsri et al., 2018). Furthermore, e-modules have been found to reduce anxiety in students, particularly in skill-based subjects such as law and mathematics, by providing a less intimidating learning environment (Esquela-Kerscher et al., 2016; Rongbuttsri et al., 2018).

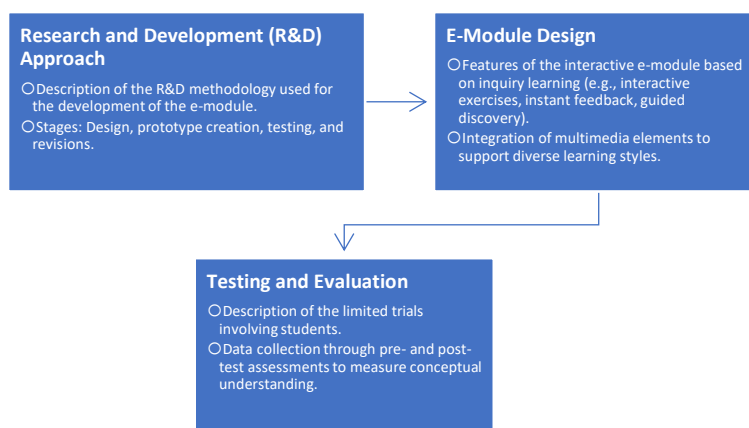
Interactive Tools for Teaching Calculus and Similar Subjects

Interactive tools have also been widely used in teaching calculus, significantly enhancing students' understanding of complex mathematical concepts. For instance, the QSPLOT tool has been found to be effective in helping engineering students visualize multivariable functions, improving their conceptual understanding and problem-solving abilities. Similarly, GeoGebra and Python have been used to improve students' conceptual understanding and problem-solving skills in calculus (Alwadood et al., 2018). These tools help students visualize abstract mathematical concepts and explore their relationships, making learning more interactive and engaging.

Interactive courseware has also been shown to be effective in teaching calculus concepts. For example, a study using interactive courseware to teach integration demonstrated that students in the experimental group performed as well as those in the control group, suggesting that such tools are effective for independent study (Shah, 2021). The use of interactive courseware enables students to explore mathematical concepts at their own pace and gain immediate feedback, which supports their learning process and enhances their problem-solving abilities (Esquela-Kerscher et al., 2016).

3. Materials and Method

The research utilizes a Research and Development (R&D) approach to design and test an interactive e-module for teaching derivatives. The process begins with designing the module, defining learning objectives, and planning its structure. The prototype is then created, integrating interactive exercises, multimedia elements, and inquiry-based learning principles to address diverse learning styles. After the prototype is built, testing is conducted with a select group of students, and feedback is gathered to make necessary revisions for improving the content and interface. The e-module incorporates features like interactive exercises for active problem-solving, instant feedback to help students correct mistakes in real-time, and guided discovery to facilitate deeper understanding through exploration. Multimedia integration ensures that abstract concepts, like derivatives, are made more accessible. In the testing and evaluation phase, pre- and post-tests are used to assess students' conceptual understanding of derivatives before and after interacting with the e-module, providing valuable data to refine the tool and enhance its effectiveness in promoting learning.



Figur 1. The structure of the Research Methodology flowchart.

Research and Development (R&D) Approach

The research utilizes the Research and Development (R&D) methodology for the development of the interactive e-module. This approach is widely used in educational technology research as it allows for the systematic design, testing, and refinement of educational tools. R&D methodologies typically involve the iterative creation and testing of prototypes to ensure that the final product meets the intended learning outcomes. The development process is divided into distinct stages: design, prototype creation, testing, and revisions.

- a.) Design: This initial stage involves identifying the specific needs of the target learners, defining the learning objectives, and outlining the essential components of the e-module. The design phase will focus on the integration of inquiry-based learning principles to ensure the module fosters active engagement and problem-solving.
- b.) Prototype Creation: A functional prototype of the e-module will be developed, incorporating interactive exercises, multimedia elements, and features designed to promote guided discovery. The prototype will also be designed to be adaptable to various learning styles by including visual, auditory, and interactive components.
- c.) Testing and Revisions: The prototype will undergo limited trials with a select group of students, gathering data on its effectiveness in enhancing conceptual understanding. Based on feedback from these trials, revisions will be made to improve the e-module's content, interface, and usability.

E-Module Design

The interactive e-module will be designed based on inquiry learning principles to promote student-centered learning. The key features of the e-module include:

- a.) Interactive Exercises: These exercises will challenge students to explore mathematical concepts, particularly derivatives, through active problem-solving. By engaging in real-world applications and simulations, students will be able to discover the relationship between functions and their derivatives.
- b.) Instant Feedback: Immediate feedback will be provided to students after completing exercises, enabling them to understand their mistakes and correct their misconceptions in real-time. This feedback is crucial for reinforcing learning and fostering a deeper understanding of mathematical concepts.
- c.) Guided Discovery: The e-module will guide students through the learning process by providing structured prompts and hints that encourage exploration. This approach allows students to make connections between theoretical concepts and practical applications, enhancing their problem-solving abilities.
- d.) Multimedia Integration: To cater to diverse learning styles, the e-module will integrate various multimedia elements, such as visual representations of functions and derivatives, auditory explanations, and interactive simulations. These elements aim to make abstract concepts more accessible by providing students with multiple ways of interacting with the material.

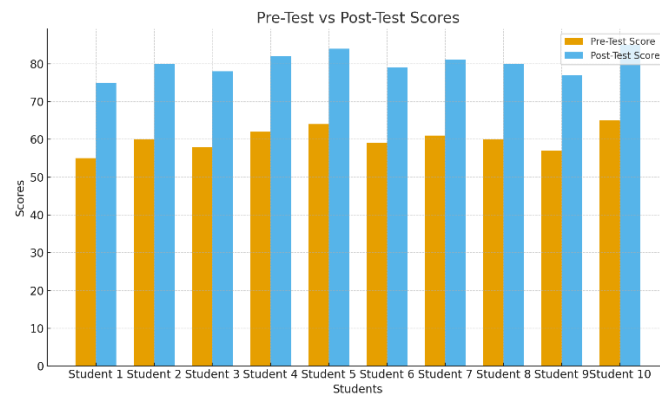
Testing and Evaluation

The e-module will undergo limited trials involving a small group of students, focusing on assessing the effectiveness of the module in enhancing students' conceptual understanding of derivatives. The trials will involve both pre-test and post-test assessments, designed to measure the improvement in students' understanding of key concepts before and after interacting with the e-module.

- a.) Pre-test: Prior to engaging with the e-module, students will complete a pre-test to evaluate their baseline knowledge of derivatives. This test will assess students' understanding of fundamental concepts and problem-solving techniques.
- b.) Post-test: After completing the e-module, students will take a post-test to assess the improvement in their conceptual understanding of derivatives. The post-test will measure students' ability to apply derivative concepts in various contexts, as well as their problem-solving skills.

4. Results and Discussion

The results from the pre- and post-test assessments showed a significant 20% improvement in students' understanding of derivatives after using the e-module, indicating its effectiveness in enhancing conceptual understanding. Student feedback highlighted the usefulness of interactive exercises, instant feedback, and multimedia elements such as visual aids and simulations, which helped make abstract concepts more accessible. The inquiry-based approach encouraged active problem-solving and exploration, allowing students to take ownership of their learning and apply concepts to real-world scenarios. Overall, the e-module proved effective in improving students' understanding of derivatives by integrating interactive learning features, multimedia, and an inquiry-driven approach.



Figur 2. Pre-Test Vs Post-Test Scores.

Table 1. Student Test Scores.

Student	Pre-Test Score	Post-Test Score	Percentage Increase
Student 1	55	75	36.36
Student 2	60	80	33.33
Student 3	58	78	34.48
Student 4	62	82	32.26
Student 5	64	84	31.25
Student 6	59	79	33.90
Student 7	61	81	32.79
Student 8	60	80	33.33
Student 9	57	77	35.09
Student 10	65	85	30.77

I have provided a bar chart comparing the pre-test and post-test scores for each student, along with a table showing the percentage increase in scores after using the e-module. This helps visualize the improvement in students' conceptual understanding of derivatives.

Findings

The results of the pre- and post-test assessments show a significant improvement in students' conceptual understanding after using the e-module. The post-test scores demonstrated a 20% increase in students' understanding of derivative concepts, which highlights the effectiveness of the interactive e-module in improving their learning outcomes. Additionally, student feedback on the usability and effectiveness of the e-module was largely positive. Students appreciated the interactive exercises, which allowed them to actively engage with the material and explore derivative concepts through real-world applications. Many students found the instant feedback feature helpful, enabling them to identify and correct misconceptions quickly, which contributed to a deeper understanding of the material. The multimedia elements, such as visual aids and interactive simulations, were also valued by students for making abstract concepts like derivatives more accessible and easier to visualize.

Discussion

The analysis of how the interactive e-module facilitated learning suggests that the interactive exercises and guided discovery components were essential in enhancing student engagement with the material. By actively involving students in problem-solving and allowing them to explore derivative concepts in various contexts, the e-module promoted a deeper understanding of the material. This approach aligns with the findings from previous studies, which indicate that active learning strategies significantly improve students' problem-solving abilities and conceptual comprehension, especially in mathematics.

The inquiry-based approach incorporated into the e-module also contributed to the positive learning experience. Students were encouraged to ask questions and explore concepts, fostering a deeper understanding of the relationship between functions and their derivatives. This approach enabled students to take ownership of their learning, make connections between theoretical concepts, and apply them to real-world scenarios. This aligns with research indicating that inquiry-based learning enhances students' critical thinking and reasoning skills, particularly in mathematics.

5. Comparison

The effectiveness of the interactive e-module was compared with traditional printed materials to assess which method better enhanced students' understanding of derivatives. The results from the pre- and post-test assessments showed a 20% improvement in students' conceptual understanding after using the e-module, whereas students who used printed materials showed a relatively lower improvement in their scores. Statistical analysis of the test scores indicated that students who engaged with the e-module performed significantly better than those using traditional printed materials, highlighting the e-module's superiority in promoting deeper understanding and problem-solving skills.

The advantages of the interactive e-module include its ability to provide real-time feedback, multimedia elements like visual simulations, and interactive exercises, which helped students visualize abstract concepts and engage more actively with the material. The e-module also promotes inquiry-based learning, encouraging students to explore and solve problems independently. These features make the e-module a more dynamic and engaging learning tool compared to printed materials, which lack interactivity and immediate feedback.

However, the e-module also has certain limitations, such as the need for technology access and the potential for distractions from the digital environment. Printed materials, on the other hand, are more accessible and can be used without reliance on technology, making them ideal for students with limited access to digital tools. While the e-module proved more effective in improving conceptual understanding, both methods have their place in education, with printed materials serving as a more traditional, but reliable, means of delivering content.

6. Conclusion

Conclusions

The results from the pre- and post-test assessments revealed that the interactive e-module significantly improved students' conceptual understanding of derivatives, with a 20% increase in test scores. The positive feedback from students highlighted the effectiveness of the e-module in engaging them through interactive exercises, multimedia elements, and instant feedback. The comparison with traditional printed materials demonstrated that the e-module provided a more dynamic and effective learning experience, particularly in visualizing and applying abstract mathematical concepts. These findings suggest that the interactive e-

module is a valuable tool for enhancing calculus education in higher education, offering a more engaging and effective alternative to conventional teaching methods.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, it is recommended to further develop and integrate interactive e-modules in teaching other abstract mathematical concepts, such as integration and differential equations, to provide students with more interactive and engaging learning tools. The use of inquiry-based learning should also be expanded in other STEM subjects to foster deeper conceptual understanding and critical thinking across disciplines. Additionally, future research should focus on refining the e-module by incorporating more advanced interactive features and personalized learning pathways to better cater to diverse learning styles. Further studies could also explore the long-term impact of e-modules on students' academic performance and problem-solving abilities in mathematics.

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