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The Effect of Differentiated Instruction on the Reading Comprehension Ability of Third-Grade Students at SD Inpres 8 Mamboro

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ABSTRACT

Reading comprehension is a fundamental skill that enables elementary school students to understand information, construct meaning from texts, and achieve success in various learning areas. Despite its importance, students often display different levels of reading comprehension due to variations in learning readiness, interests, and abilities. This study aimed to investigate the effect of differentiated instruction on the reading comprehension ability of third-grade students at SD Inpres 8 Mamboro. A quantitative approach with a one-group pretest–posttest design was employed. The sample consisted of 30 third-grade students selected through saturated sampling. Data were collected using a validated multiple-choice reading comprehension test, with a Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficient of 0.840, indicating high reliability. Descriptive analysis showed that the mean score increased from 73.70 in the pretest to 97.04 in the posttest, demonstrating substantial improvement. Since the data were not normally distributed, the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test was applied. The results indicated a significance value of 0.001 ($p < 0.05$), confirming a significant improvement in students' reading comprehension after the implementation of differentiated instruction. These findings indicate that differentiated instruction effectively accommodates diverse learning needs, enhances student engagement, and improves reading comprehension skills, making it a valuable instructional approach for elementary school education.

1. Introduction

Education is a deliberate effort to facilitate the transmission of culture from one generation to the next. Through education, values, knowledge, and experiences from previous generations can be passed on and further developed by succeeding (Purnama Sari & Dwi, 2022; Zafirah et al., 2025). To date, education has not been

fully defined in a comprehensive manner due to its complex nature and its primary focus on human beings. This complexity has contributed to the emergence of educational science as a field of study that examines education from a scientific perspective. Educational science extends educational practice by emphasizing the development of theories, concepts, and scientific perspectives related to educational processes. Therefore, education and educational science are closely interconnected, both practically and theoretically, complementing one another in human life (Yusuf et al., 2026; Zafirah et al., 2025).

Along with the development of the times, education in Indonesia has continued to undergo various reforms, one of which is the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, which emphasizes student-centered learning and the development of 21st-century competencies (Dewi et al., 2026). Within this curriculum, differentiated instruction has become one of the approaches emphasized in the teaching and learning process. Differentiated instruction is an instructional approach designed to accommodate the diverse characteristics of students in heterogeneous classrooms. Through this approach, teachers are expected to design learning activities by considering students' differences in abilities, interests, and learning needs (Marantika et al., 2023). Differentiated instruction provides students with opportunities to access information in various ways through modifications in content, process, and learning products. As a result, students are able to learn according to their abilities and learning styles, thereby making the learning process more effective (Purnawanto, 2023; Susanti et al., 2023).

Literacy skills, particularly reading comprehension, represent one of the aspects that can be developed through the implementation of differentiated instruction. Differences in students' reading comprehension abilities require teachers to implement instructional strategies that are responsive to individual learning needs (Kargiotidis et al., 2026; Suwartiningsih, 2021). Through differentiated instruction, teachers can provide a variety of reading materials, teaching methods, and learning activities tailored to students' levels of readiness. Consequently, students' motivation, engagement, and reading comprehension abilities may improve more effectively (Apriyanti et al., 2025; Nurwahida et al., 2026). In addition, differentiated learning has been reported to improve students' participation and learning outcomes in elementary education settings (Faiz et al., 2025). Consequently, students' motivation, engagement, and reading comprehension abilities may improve more effectively (Suwartiningsih, 2021). Similar findings indicate that learning approaches tailored to students' characteristics and needs can significantly improve learning outcomes and participation in elementary schools (Faiz et al., 2025).

Reading comprehension itself is an essential skill in the learning process at the elementary school level. It refers to the process of reading aimed at understanding both explicit and implicit meanings contained in a text (Istiqomah & Juansah, 2024). Through reading activities, students acquire information and knowledge that support cognitive development and contribute to academic success across subject areas. In the digital era, literacy development is also supported by access to diverse learning resources and reading materials that facilitate students' comprehension and

independent learning processes (Sari et al., 2025). Elementary school students, particularly those in lower grades, are considered to have good reading comprehension skills when they are able to identify main ideas, understand word meanings, and restate information contained in a text (Kargiotidis et al., 2026). In addition, reading comprehension can also be understood as a reading activity intended to grasp the author's message, including ideas or meanings that are not directly expressed in the text (Juliana et al., 2025). Previous studies published in JES UNRI also indicate that literacy-oriented learning contributes significantly to the development of students' comprehension and critical thinking skills (Sari et al., 2025).

Based on a preliminary observation conducted on Monday, October 21, 2025, in Grade III at SD Inpres 8 Mamboro, students demonstrated varying levels of reading comprehension ability. The observation was conducted during an Indonesian language lesson on the topic of identifying important information from reading texts. During the activity, the teacher provided a short text entitled *The Rabbit and the Turtle* and asked students to read the text and answer several comprehension questions related to its content. The results indicated that although most students were able to read the text fluently, many had not yet developed a thorough understanding of the content. This was evident from their difficulties in answering questions, identifying main ideas, understanding word meanings, and drawing conclusions from the text. Similar findings have been reported in previous studies showing that elementary students often experience difficulties in extracting information and interpreting text meaning (Istiqomah & Juansah, 2024; Purnama Sari & Dwi, 2022).

Of the 30 students observed, 13 students were able to answer all questions correctly, while the remaining 17 students still encountered difficulties in understanding the text. The difficulties experienced by students included identifying main ideas, understanding the meaning of words within context, and drawing conclusions from the reading passage. In addition, some students appeared to focus more on mechanical reading without paying sufficient attention to the meaning and message conveyed in the text. These findings are consistent with previous research indicating that reading fluency does not automatically guarantee reading comprehension ability (Kargiotidis et al., 2026).

Based on the observation findings, it was identified that the reading instruction implemented by the teacher had generally been carried out effectively. The teacher had applied common instructional methods used in elementary schools, such as explanation, question-and-answer sessions, and reading assignments followed by comprehension questions. However, the learning process remained predominantly teacher-centered and had not yet systematically addressed students' differences in reading ability. Previous studies have shown that learning activities designed according to students' characteristics and needs tend to produce better engagement and learning achievement than uniform instructional practices (Faiz et al., 2025). In fact, classroom settings often involve diverse levels of reading fluency and reading comprehension (Isky et al., 2025). As a result, some students, particularly those with lower reading ability, continued to experience difficulties in optimally

understanding texts. Other research emphasizes that learning strategies must be tailored to student characteristics to ensure equitable learning opportunities and outcomes (Dewi et al., 2026).

Differences in students' ability to understand learning materials require an instructional approach capable of accommodating individual learning needs, one of which is differentiated instruction. Through this approach, teachers are able to adjust instructional content, processes, and products according to students' needs and abilities so that reading comprehension ability is expected to improve. Furthermore, active learning strategies and interactive reading activities have been found to enhance students' understanding of narrative texts and strengthen their engagement during literacy learning (Zafirah et al., 2025).

Learning media and instructional approaches that encourage student participation also contribute positively to students' understanding of learning materials (Isky et al., 2025). Other research shows that differentiated and student-centered learning approaches make a positive contribution to students' academic achievement and literacy development (Faiz et al., 2025; Sari et al., 2025). Therefore, differentiated instruction is considered relevant for addressing reading comprehension challenges in elementary schools. Based on the explanation above, the researcher was interested in conducting a study entitled "The Effect of Differentiated Instruction on the Reading Comprehension Ability of Third-Grade Students at SD Inpres 8 Mamboro."

2. Methodology

This study employed a quantitative research approach. According to (Sugiyono, 2019), quantitative research is a method based on the philosophy of positivism, which is used to investigate particular populations or samples. Data collection techniques involve the use of research instruments, while data analysis is conducted quantitatively or statistically to test predetermined hypotheses. The research design involved administering tests on two occasions, namely before and after the treatment. The experimental class was initially given a pretest (O_1) to determine students' initial reading comprehension ability. Subsequently, the students received treatment (X) in the form of differentiated instruction in the Indonesian language subject, particularly in reading comprehension materials. After the implementation of differentiated instruction, students were administered a posttest (O_2) to assess their learning outcomes following the treatment. The pretest and posttest results were then compared to determine the extent to which differentiated instruction influenced the reading comprehension ability of third-grade students at SD Inpres 8 Mamboro.

The sampling technique employed in this study was saturated sampling, also referred to as total sampling, in which all members of the population were included as research participants. In other words, all third-grade students at SD Inpres 8 Mamboro were selected as the research sample because the population size was

relatively small and feasible to be studied in its entirety. The sample distribution is presented in the table 1.

Table 1. Distribution of Research Participants

Number	Class	Students	Total
1.	III A	Male	19
		Female	11
	Grand Total		30

In addition, the data collection techniques employed in this study included an achievement test to measure the extent of students' reading comprehension ability before and after receiving the treatment. The test administered to students consisted of a multiple-choice achievement test developed based on competency achievement indicators in the Indonesian language subject, particularly on the topic Understanding Simple Narrative Texts. The instrument consisted of 11 valid and reliable test items. The test blueprint and test items are presented in the appendix. In this study, instrument analysis included validity and reliability testing to ensure the appropriateness of the research instrument. Meanwhile, the data analysis techniques used to test the research hypothesis included a normality test and hypothesis testing.

3. Results and Discussion

Before being used in the study, the research instrument underwent an expert validation process. The validated instrument included a test blueprint and multiple-choice questions for the Indonesian language subject on the topic of understanding simple narrative texts, with an initial total of 20 items. During the validation process, the validator assessed the instrument using a validation sheet and provided several recommendations for improving the test items. The validation results indicated that nine items did not meet the required criteria and therefore needed to be removed. After revisions were made based on the validator's suggestions, 11 multiple-choice items were declared valid and appropriate for use in the pilot testing stage of the study. Subsequently, the 11 test items were piloted with 30 students at SD Inpres 1 Tondo and analyzed using SPSS version 25. The r-table value was determined based on the number of respondents involved. With a total of 30 respondents, the r-table value at a 5% significance level was 0.361. The validity test was conducted to determine whether each test item was able to measure the intended construct appropriately. The results of the validity analysis are presented in table 2.

Table 2. Results of the Validity Test

Item No.	Pearson Correlation	Sig. Value	Conclusion
Item 1	.628	.000	Valid
Item 2	.519	.003	Valid
Item 3	.320	.217	Invalid
Item 4	.232	.218	Invalid
Item 5	.673	.000	Valid
Item 6	.532	.002	Valid

Item 7	.872	.000	Valid
Item 8	.824	.000	Valid
Item 9	.678	.000	Valid
Item 10	.784	.000	Valid
Item 11	.436	.016	Valid

Based on the validity test results presented in table 2, it was found that of the 11 test items piloted, 9 items were declared valid. Meanwhile, the remaining 2 items were classified as invalid because their significance values exceeded 0.05. Therefore, these invalid items needed to be eliminated or revised, as they had not yet adequately measured students' abilities.

Reliability Test

The reliability test was conducted after the test instrument had been validated. A research instrument is considered reliable if it produces consistent results when measurements are repeated under similar conditions. The reliability testing of the instrument was conducted using SPSS version 25, in which the calculation was automatically performed using Cronbach's Alpha. Reliability analysis using Cronbach's Alpha is presented in table 3.

Table 3. Reliability Test Results

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	.840
Number of Items (N of Items)	9

Based on the reliability test, a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.840 was obtained, indicating that the instrument was reliable and categorized as good for use in the study.

Descriptive Analysis

Descriptive analysis was conducted using SPSS version 25 for Windows. This analysis presents several descriptive statistics, including the mean, minimum, maximum, and standard deviation, as presented in table 4.

Table 4. Descriptive Analysis Results

Descriptives			
		Statistic	Std. Error
Pretest	Mean	73,70	4,16
	Median	77,78	
	Std. Daviation	22,77	
	Minimum	11,11	
	Maximum	100	
Posttest	Mean	97,04	1,16
	Median	100	
	Std. Davition	6,36	
	Minimum	88,89	
	Maximum	100	

Based on the data presented in table 4, this study involved a total of 30 students as research participants. The results of the descriptive analysis showed that the mean pretest score was 73.70, while the mean posttest score increased to 97.04. The median score for the pretest was 77.78, whereas the posttest median reached 100. In terms of score distribution, the standard deviation of the pretest was 22.77, while the posttest standard deviation decreased to 6.36. Furthermore, the minimum and maximum pretest scores were 11.11 and 100, respectively, whereas the posttest scores ranged from a minimum of 88.89 to a maximum of 100. These findings indicate an improvement in students' learning outcomes following the implementation of the treatment.

Furthermore, the distribution of students' scores also demonstrated notable progress. In the pretest, the lowest score obtained by students was 11.11, while the highest score reached 100.00. In contrast, the minimum score in the posttest increased substantially to 88.89, while the maximum score remained at 100.00. Overall, the average student score increased from 73.70 in the pretest to 97.04 in the posttest. These numerical changes further reinforce the conclusion that, descriptively, there was a clear improvement in the quality of students' learning outcomes following the implementation of the instructional method applied in this study.

Normality Test

The normality test was conducted to determine whether the collected data were normally distributed. In this study, the normality test was performed using the Shapiro–Wilk test with the assistance of SPSS Statistics 25. The criterion used to assess normality was based on the significance value (Sig.). If the significance value was greater than 0.05 (Sig. > 0.05), the data were considered normally distributed. Conversely, if the significance value was less than 0.05 (Sig. < 0.05), the data were considered not normally distributed. The results of the normality test are presented in table 5.

Table 5. Normality Test Results

	Test of Normality		
	Statistic	df	Sig.
Pretest	0,176	30	0,007
Posttest	0,488	30	0,000

The normality test in this study was conducted using the Kolmogorov–Smirnov test with Lilliefors significance correction. The criterion used to determine normality was based on the significance value (Sig.). If the significance value exceeded 0.05 (Sig. > 0.05), the data were considered normally distributed. Conversely, if the significance value was lower than 0.05 (Sig. < 0.05), the data were considered not normally distributed. Based on the calculation results presented in Table 4.4, the significance value for the pretest data was 0.007, while the significance value for the posttest data was 0.000. Since both significance values were below the threshold of 0.05, it can be concluded that the data in this study were not normally distributed.

Therefore, hypothesis testing was subsequently conducted using the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test.

Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test

Hypothesis testing is intended to statistically evaluate the validity of a proposed assumption and determine whether the hypothesis should be accepted or rejected. In this study, hypothesis testing was conducted to examine whether there was a difference in students' learning outcomes before and after the treatment was administered. Since the results of the normality test indicated that the data were not normally distributed, a nonparametric analysis was employed, namely the *Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test*. Data processing was conducted using *IBM SPSS version 25*. The hypothesis testing was performed at a significance level of 0.05. The decision criteria stated that if the significance value (*Sig.*) was less than 0.05, the null hypothesis (H_0) would be rejected and the alternative hypothesis (H_a) accepted. Conversely, if the significance value (*Sig.*) exceeded 0.05, the null hypothesis (H_0) would be accepted and the alternative hypothesis (H_a) rejected. The results of the analysis are shown in table 6.

Table 6. Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test Results

Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test Results	
N	30
Test Statistic	325.000
Z (Standardized Test Statistic)	4.408
Sig	<0,001

The results of hypothesis testing using the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test showed an Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) value of 0.001. Since this value was lower than 0.05, it can be concluded that the treatment administered had a statistically significant effect on students' learning outcomes. This finding was evident from the significant difference between students' scores before the treatment (*pretest*) and after the treatment (*posttest*) among the sample of 30 students.

Discussion

This study employed a quantitative approach using a pre-experimental design and was conducted at SD Inpres 8 Mamboro. The study aimed to determine whether differentiated instruction had an effect on the reading comprehension ability of third-grade students. The research applied a one group pretest and posttest design with one class serving as the research sample. The first meeting began with the administration of a pretest to determine students' initial reading comprehension ability. Subsequently, the researcher conducted Indonesian language instruction by implementing differentiated instruction. During the treatment process, differentiated instruction was applied through the differentiation of content, process, and learning products. At the initial stage, the teacher carried out a preliminary identification of students' reading abilities based on initial observations and students' pretest performance. Based on these findings, the teacher adjusted

instructional materials and learning activities to better align with students' learning needs.

In content differentiation, students were provided with reading materials of varying levels of complexity adjusted to their reading abilities. Students who still experienced difficulties in understanding reading texts were given simpler texts with more accessible vocabulary, whereas students with stronger reading abilities were provided with more complex texts requiring deeper comprehension of information. In process differentiation, learning activities were carried out through shared reading activities, discussions, question-and-answer sessions, teacher guidance, and exercises focused on identifying important information from reading texts. Teachers provided different forms of guidance according to students' individual needs, such as helping them identify main ideas, understand word meanings, and draw conclusions from reading passages. Throughout the learning process, students were also encouraged to discuss and ask questions about the reading materials, which contributed to greater learning engagement.

In product differentiation, students were asked to demonstrate their reading comprehension through various activities, such as answering questions related to the text, retelling important information from the reading passage, and explaining conclusions using their own words. The implementation of these differentiated practices enabled students to learn according to their level of readiness and individual learning characteristics, thereby supporting a more effective reading comprehension process.

Throughout the learning process, students appeared active and enthusiastic in participating in classroom activities. Students were able to understand reading materials more easily because instruction was adjusted to their individual needs, abilities, and learning characteristics. In addition, students demonstrated greater confidence in asking questions, participating in discussions, and expressing their opinions during classroom activities. The final meeting concluded with the administration of a posttest to determine improvements in students' reading comprehension ability after the treatment had been implemented.

Based on the results of the normality test using the Shapiro–Wilk method, it was found that the pretest and posttest data were not normally distributed. Therefore, hypothesis testing was continued using a nonparametric analysis, namely the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test. The results of the Wilcoxon test at a significance level of 0.05 yielded a significance value of 0.000. Since the significance value was lower than 0.05, H_0 was rejected and H_a was accepted. Thus, it can be concluded that differentiated instruction had a significant effect on the reading comprehension ability of third-grade students at SD Inpres 8 Mamboro.

Differentiated instruction influenced students' reading comprehension ability because the learning process was adjusted to students' individual needs, abilities, and learning characteristics. In practice, teachers did not provide identical learning activities to all students uniformly; instead, instructional activities were adapted according to students' levels of readiness. Such adjustments were reflected in the

selection of reading materials, reading guidance, and learning activities tailored to students' abilities to understand the content of texts. During the learning process, students with lower reading ability received more intensive guidance and support in understanding text content, identifying important information, and understanding word meanings within context. Meanwhile, students with stronger reading ability were provided with opportunities to engage in more complex activities, such as identifying main ideas, explaining the content of texts, and expressing opinions about the reading materials. This condition enabled each student to learn according to their own level of ability, preventing them from feeling overwhelmed or left behind during instruction.

These instructional adjustments also contributed to increased student participation and learning motivation. This was reflected in students' more active involvement in asking questions, participating in discussions, answering questions, and expressing opinions throughout the learning process. When students perceived that instructional materials matched their abilities and learning needs, their self-confidence increased, thereby making the process of understanding reading texts more effective. As student engagement improved, their ability to comprehend information, identify main ideas, understand word meanings, and draw conclusions from texts also improved.

From a theoretical perspective, differentiated instruction emphasizes the adjustment of content, process, and learning products according to students' learning needs so that each learner receives learning experiences aligned with their readiness, interests, and individual characteristics. Such flexible instruction supports students in learning more effectively because teachers provide learning experiences that are more relevant and accessible. Therefore, differentiated instruction can foster a more inclusive learning environment and support the improvement of elementary school students' reading comprehension ability.

The findings of this study are consistent with the research conducted by (Wahyuningsari et al., 2022), which demonstrated that differentiated instruction positively influenced students' reading comprehension ability because learning activities were adapted to individual learning needs. This finding is also supported by the study of (Isky et al., 2025), which reported that differentiated instructional strategies were effective in improving elementary school students' reading literacy and comprehension ability. Furthermore, (Zafirah et al., 2025) found that differentiated instruction had a positive effect on students' reading ability, as students became more active, motivated, and capable of understanding instructional materials more effectively.

Another study conducted by (Nurwahida et al., 2026) also revealed that differentiated instruction had a positive and significant effect on elementary school students' reading ability. Differentiated instruction was found to enhance students' motivation, active participation, and reading comprehension because the learning process was adapted to students' learning characteristics. In addition, (Nurwahida et al., 2026) emphasized the important role of differentiated instruction in helping students understand materials according to their abilities and learning

characteristics, thereby supporting improvements in reading comprehension ability. Therefore, the findings of this study reinforce the view that differentiated instruction is an effective instructional approach for improving the reading comprehension ability of elementary school students.

4. Conclusion

This study concludes that differentiated instruction has a positive effect on the reading comprehension ability of third-grade students at SD Inpres 8 Mambo. The implementation of differentiated instruction successfully improved students' ability to identify main ideas, understand vocabulary in context, interpret information, and draw conclusions from reading texts. By adapting instructional content, learning processes, and learning products to students' readiness and learning characteristics, students became more actively engaged, participated more confidently in classroom activities, and demonstrated better understanding of reading materials. These findings indicate that differentiated instruction provides a more inclusive and responsive learning environment that accommodates individual differences among students. As a result, students are able to learn according to their needs and abilities, which supports the development of reading comprehension more effectively than uniform instructional practices. Therefore, differentiated instruction can be considered an effective pedagogical approach for improving reading comprehension in elementary school classrooms, particularly within the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. Future studies are recommended to employ experimental designs with control groups, involve larger samples from different schools, and examine the long-term effects of differentiated instruction on various literacy skills.

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