

# **THE EFFECTS OF SENTENCE STRUCTURE MASTERY AND CRITICAL THINKING ON STUDENT'S READING COMPREHENSION**

Elyza Martiarini

English Education Program  
School Of Language and Arts, University of Indraprasta PGRI  
Jl. Nangka 58 Tanjung Barat, Jakarta Selatan, 12530  
*elyza.martia@yahoo.com*

## ***Abstract***

*The aim of the research is to obtain empirical data about the effects of sentence structure mastery and critical thinking on student's reading comprehension. The research was conducted at grade XI from three Private Senior High Schools at South Jakarta. Research method is survey. The sample was taken randomly. There are three kinds of data: data of sentence structure mastery, data of critical thinking, and data of reading comprehension. The instrument tests were firstly tried out to determine the validity and reliability. For sentence structure mastery, critical thinking, and reading comprehension's tests, validity is calculated by Point-Biserial technique and reliability is measured by Split-Half method (Spearman Brown). Research finding shows three point: first, there are significant effects of sentence structure mastery and critical thinking on student's reading comprehension. Second, there is significant effect of sentence structure mastery on reading comprehension. Third, there is significant effect of critical thinking on student's reading comprehension.*

*Keywords: Reading Comprehension, Sentence Structure Mastery, Critical Thinking*

## **PENGARUH PENGUASAAN STRUKTUR KALIMAT DAN BERPIKIR KRITIS PADA PEMAHAMAN MEMBACA SISWA**

### **Abstrak**

Tujuan penelitian ini adalah mengetahui pengaruh penguasaan struktur kalimat dan berpikir kritis terhadap pemahaman membaca siswa. Penelitian ini dilaksanakan pada siswa kelas XI dari 3 SMA Swasta di Jakarta Selatan. Metode penelitian yang digunakan dalam penelitian ini adalah survei. Sampel diambil secara acak. Data terdiri dari tiga, yaitu data penguasaan struktur kalimat, data berpikir kritis, dan data pemahaman membaca. Sebelum dilakukan tes terhadap sample, terlebih dahulu dilakukan uji validitas dan reliabilitas. Untuk tes penguasaan struktur kalimat, berpikir kritis, dan pemahaman membaca, validitas dihitung dengan menggunakan teknik *Point Biserial* dan reliabilitas dengan menggunakan *Split-Half Method* (Spearman Brown). Hasil penelitian menunjukkan: Terdapat pengaruh yang signifikan antara penguasaan struktur kalimat dan berpikir kritis terhadap pemahaman membaca siswa. Kedua, terdapat pengaruh yang signifikan antara penguasaan struktur kalimat terhadap pemahaman membaca siswa. Ketiga, terdapat pengaruh yang signifikan antara berpikir kritis terhadap pemahaman membaca siswa.

Kata Kunci: Pemahaman Membaca, Penguasaan Struktur Kalimat, Berpikir Kritis

## INTRODUCTION

Language is the most important aspect in the life of all beings. We use language to express inner thoughts and emotions, make sense of complex and abstract thought, to learn and to communicate with others, to fulfill our wants and needs, as well as to establish rules and maintain our culture. It also can be defined as verbal, physical, biologically innate, and a basic form of communication.

As a communication system, language is also thought to be fundamentally different from and of much higher complexity than those of other species as it is based on a complex system of rules relating symbols to their meanings, resulting in an indefinite number of possible innovative utterances from a finite number of elements. It is thought to have originated when early hominids first started cooperating, adapting earlier systems of communication based on expressive signs to include a theory of other minds and shared intentionality.

This development is thought to have coincided with an increase in brain volume, and is processed in many different locations in the human brain. Humans acquire language through social interaction in early childhood, and children generally speak fluently when they are around three years old. The use of language has become deeply entrenched in human culture, and apart from being used to communicate and share information, it also has social and cultural uses, such as signifying group identity, social stratification and for social grooming and entertainment. It also describes the set of rules that makes

this possible, or the set of utterances that can be produced from those rules.

However, language is used for communication among individuals. It is therefore socially learned behavior a skill that is acquired as we grow up in society. Each language is a part of the culture that produces it and is adequate for the needs of the people who use it, because language is an element of communication used by everyone to express idea, opinion and feeling either in a spoken or written way.

English as an international language is a means of communication used by more millions people all over the world. Nowadays it becomes the language of commerce, culture, technology and politics as well as education. In addition, it contributes a lot to the development of human civilization. Realizing the importance as a tool to get involved in every aspect of international world, our government has set English as a foreign language for many periods of time in Indonesia.

Therefore, English is one of the subjects for students of senior high school in Indonesia, and it is a language that has to be learned beside Bahasa Indonesia. Moreover, this subject is taught around six hours a week. Some activities made in learning process, it should contain a drill for the four language skills, such as listening, reading, speaking, and writing, which formulated to be unity with the three language components, such phonology, vocabulary, and grammar.

In the simplest terms, language is a method of teaching children to read by recognizing words as whole pieces of language. Proponents of the whole

language philosophy believe that language should not be broken down into letters and combinations of letters and decoded. Instead, they believe that language is a complete system of making meaning, with words functioning in relation to each other in context.

A general concern in Asian schools today is the quality of students' thinking. Today, both critical and creative thinking skills are being taught in most Asian schools and an important thinking skill that these students should have is the ability to think critically in order to be able to evaluate an argument. This is because many Asian students are used to rote learning and the use of both critical and creative thinking skills are not part of their daily routine. In addition, many Asian students may be more reluctant than other students to participate in argument because of their cultural background. Furthermore, argumentation is not traditionally practiced in the Asian countries.

Often these students find it difficult to think critically and need a great deal of structured guidance when completing tasks which require higher order thinking skills. In the language classroom, learning to think critically can be done through the process of learning reading comprehension. It requires much practice in critical thinking, composing, developing and analyzing ideas. Critical thinking is infused in many Asian English language classrooms through the teaching of reading, writing, and speaking.

Reading skill is now seen as a logical destination within a curriculum. In the past, this type of skill was defined as the ability to understand the works of great

literature. Currently reading skill is much more widely understood terms to the flexibility of the language users to understand the tasks related to the reading materials which he found in the environment.

Teaching English at schools is more emphasized on reading comprehension and language structures. One of factors which must be considered in the preparation of the syllabus is by selecting the elements of grammar (structural items), classifying down, and managing them in proper sequences in the teaching program. The success in the language learning is emphasized in the ability to use language structures and develop the correct sentences.

Availability of material that is easy to be understood by students in the learning process is still a problem. Those teaching materials which are easy to be comprehended and suitable with student's level ability, will allow them to be better learning outcomes. The extent to which it affects, is still a problem. The easy or difficulty rate of learning materials is often discussed in terms of legibility. Suitability between the difficulty level of learning materials to students' reasoning ability are essential. Proper materials in an accuracy with the cognitive level is still difficult to find. One of solutions to overcome this problem, teacher needs to encourage students to do more practices for improving reading comprehension skill. These also will be assumed to be drawn up taking into account the cognitive level of students.

Concerning of reading problems faced by students in Indonesia, especially reading the foreign source, they are just trying to

reach every single word. Students start reading a text with the fear that they are going to have problems with words and unfamiliar structures, and so that they read slowly and carefully, weighing and measuring every word, with a dictionary at their elbow as a life support system. They ironically catch the meaning of the sentence as a whole. In addition, they do not pay more attention to the punctuation, thus the core of a foreign language text translated in every single word is hardly achieved, without any communication with what they have read.

There are many factors affect someone's reading skills. One of them is about knowledge sentence. This type of knowledge sentence is formulated in sentence structure, namely a set of relationship between words that produce a statement, question, or a specific formula. A sentence structure, in turn, will set the position of each word in a sentence.

If a statement is formulated into a good and right structure, it will makes the reader can understand the statement easier. Thus, in understanding the problem of reading sentences and how to organize and cultivate a vital and fundamental issue. Though the sentence structure in a reading has been well organized, it does not mean that the reader can understand and perceive the information in the sentence easily. Readers should also use sufficient knowledge to process and understand written information they have read. In such situations, it is certain that without the knowledge of types of sentences with proper structure, a person will not be able to understand and comprehend the

message unit is formulated in each sentence is read.

Complaining about the poor reading skills of students are discussed by the linguists and others through researches, but efforts to correct deficiencies and seek breakthroughs and new methods of teaching reading are still being developed in an effort to improve reading skills.

In addition, reading is a process to understand a written text which means extracting the required information from it as efficient as possible. Reading is an active cognitive process of interacting with text and monitoring comprehension to establish meaning. It is important skill that has been mastered by people, especially by professional, such as a teacher, writer and journalist. The students should have some reading skill in learning activities.

A prevalent and current view is that comprehension is a special kind of thinking. Successful text reading comprehension involves the reader's discovering the meaning needed to achieve the particular purpose. It may be finding a particular piece of information, solving a problem through reading, working to understand idea, or following a set of direction, and it is needed to fluent reading. Building reading ability is an essential goal for teachers at all grade levels. It provides students with some activities to help them to comprehend a text and to train them to be skillful readers. Students can read various materials in English and at the same time enlarge their vocabularies to improve their language competence.

Reading is not general ability, but a composite of many specific abilities. It is therefore necessary to break down general comprehension into the specific skill which together constitutes it. It is necessary to inquire how well the students are able to grasp the general meaning of the passage, follow directions, organize what they read and classifies ideas, visualize what they have read and how well they can locate information. Nevertheless, students at general do not like to read English materials. They have difficulty in understanding texts. Instead in meaningful group of words, they read word by word and often look up meanings in a dictionary. Reading is a much more complex process. We know that effective reading involves all of the higher mental process. Good reading requires good thinking. When we teach reading, especially in the beginning stages, we must teach good thinking. Sentence structure mastery and critical thinking are the two things which have close relationship with reading comprehension that should be completely mastered by a student, and interconnected between one and another. A good mastery of the sentence can be related to one's thought processes. Person's thought processes can be related to the mastery of the sentence. So it is with reading comprehension may be associated with the control sentences, critical thinking, and mastery of one's sentence and critical thinking.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Theoretical Review**

#### **Sentence Structure Mastery**

Each language has a special structure of the language concerned. Grammar or

language structure is based on the referring to the analysis of grammar in language descriptive which explains the principles of language structure and arrangements words. Grammar is a formal description of language structure. ([http://www.susked.gov.sk.ca/docs/ella\\_gram.html](http://www.susked.gov.sk.ca/docs/ella_gram.html)).

When someone has already mastered in reading the text, thus in that reading activity is involving the cognitive and linguistic process which are synchronizely combined, where the mental process namely understanding the meaning and interpreting the text effected by factors. One of factors affect is the knowledge of the language structure such as syntax, semantic, and pragmatic.

Those language structure knowledge help students in processing sentence and its meaning stated, so it can be comprehended as well. The language structure elaborates how to formulate words (words arrangements, noun system, verb system, modifier, phrase, clause, etc.). Semantics is the study of meaning. It is a wide subject within the general study of language. An understanding of semantics is essential to the study of language acquisition (how language users acquire a sense of meaning, as speakers and writers, listeners and readers) and of language change (how meanings after over time). It is important for understanding language in social contexts, as these are likely to affect meaning, and for understanding varieties of English and effects of style. It is thus one of the most fundamental concepts in linguistics.

The study of semantics includes the study of how meaning is constructed,

interpreted, clarified, obscured, illustrated, simplified negotiated, contradicted and paraphrased. While Pragmatics is a systematic way of explaining language use in context. It seeks to explain aspects of meaning which cannot be found in the plain sense of words or structures, as explained by semantics. It is a way of investigating how sense can be made of certain texts even when, from a semantic viewpoint, the text seems to be either incomplete or to have a different meaning to what is really intended. It is crucial to understand the interrelatedness of these three dimensions, so that someone cannot say that grammar is no longer relevant and useful nowadays.

Achmad (2002: 113) said that in a view of grammatical which assumes the language structure as hierarchy subsystem, the sentence is only one unit remains bound to the larger unit, or can stand alone. There is a possibility of a relative in a larger unit that sentence stand alone, has the final intonation pattern, the actual and potential consisting of the clause. In conjunction with syntactic units (words, phrases, and clauses), the sentence can be viewed as a construct composed of the basic constituents, which is usually a clause, with final intonation, and if necessary fitted with conjunctions. Thus, there are two important issues related to the sentence, the basic constituents (words, phrases, and clauses) and the final intonation.

Kridalaksana (2008: 103) said that the sentence is (1) unit of language that is relatively self-contained, have final intonation patterns and actual or potential consists of the clause, (2) clause that is part of cognitive-free conversations;

proposition that a single unit clause or a combination of clauses, which form a free unit; minimal answers, exclamations, greetings, and so on, and (3) the grammatical construction consisting of one or more clauses which are arranged based on certain patterns and can stand alone as a single unit.

Mastery can be defined as the ability to understand and apply in a concrete form. What is meant by understanding in this matter related to the theory or the existing rules, while applying can be understood as a manifestation of the theory to a tangible form. Thus, sentence structure mastery means the ability to absorb the theory of sentence (both functions, units, or form) and be able or capable of creating standard forms in accordance with the rules and regulations.

Learning of the language structure is rather than as a formal study but as a tool to solve problems in certain situations. In mastering the concepts and principles of structure by using this way, students will develop ways of thinking and at the same time they will build vocabulary, terminology, and principles that are useful in reading comprehension.

By seeing the exposure to theories above, the essential of the ability to understand the structure of language is a skill or ability to master the system of the language rules which consists of morphology, and syntax (sentence structure), and understand the relationship between a linguistic unit, and parts of a sentence such as words, phrases, and clauses in accordance with the prevailing system of language. There are many different ways of organizing words into sentences, or we

might say, *Words can be organized into sentences in many different ways.* For this reason, describing *how* to put a sentence together isn't as easy as explaining how to bake a cake or assemble a model plane. There are no easy recipes, no step-by-step instructions. But that doesn't mean that crafting an effective sentence depends on magic or good luck.

It can be understood that the basic parts of a sentence can be combined and arranged in countless ways. So as we work to improve our skill, it is important to understand what these basic structures are and how to use them effectively. It will be begun by introducing the traditional parts of speech and the most common sentence structures, as follow: One way to begin studying basic sentence structures is to consider the traditional parts of speech (also called word classes): nouns, pronouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, prepositions, conjunctions, articles, and interjections. Except for interjections ("ouch!"), which have a habit of standing alone, and articles (*a, an, the*), which appear in front of nouns, the parts of speech come in many varieties and may show up just about anywhere in a sentence. To know for sure what part of speech a word is, we have to look not only at the word itself but also at its meaning, position, and use in a sentence.

Parts of Speech (Azar, 2006:348)

PART OF SPEECH	BASIC FUNCTION	EXAMPLES
noun	names a person, place, or thing	<i>pirate, Caribbean, ship</i>
pronoun	takes the place of a noun	<i>I, you, he, she, it, ours, them, who</i>
verb	identifies action or state of being	<i>sing, dance, believe, be</i>
adjective	modifies a noun	<i>hot, lazy,</i>

adverb	modifies a verb, adjective, or other adverb	<i>funny, softly, lazily, often</i>
preposition	shows a relationship between a noun (or pronoun) and other words in a sentence	<i>up, over, against, by, for</i>
conjunction	joins words, phrases, and clauses	<i>and, but, or, yet</i>
interjection	expresses emotion	<i>ah, whoops, ouch</i>
article	identifies and specifies a noun	<i>a, an, the</i>

### Critical Thinking

First, consider 'thinking.' The meaning of this is obvious enough, it would seem--thinking is just what happens when we let our mind do its thing. It is what we do when we deliberate, reflect, ponder, explore, interpret, create, consider, and engage in a host of additional cognitive processes. Merriam-Webster's Dictionary ([www.webster.com](http://www.webster.com)) supplies us with this suitably general definition: "to form or have in mind." Fortunately, we needn't spend too much time with this term--any exercise of our cognitive faculties that could involve evaluation is germane to our investigation. Before leaving this word, however, it is worth notion that we will concentrate in what follows on *conscious* thinking--i.e., thinking of which we are aware. While it is hoped that the skills which constitute critical thinking will become habitual, influencing us even at a sub-conscious level, this must be a consequence of the sustained conscious application of those skills.

Of the two component words, 'critical' is the one requiring more attention, as it is the one that misleads. Once again, we can turn to the dictionary for a relevant sense of 'critical': "exercising or involving careful judgment or judicious evaluation." In this sense, it is closely related to the Greek word 'kriterion,' or standard for judging. As

defined, 'critical' is essentially concerned with thinking, as judgment and evaluation are types of thinking. Further, the definition focuses attention on types of thinking that involve the consideration of an option (viz., evaluation) or options (viz., judgment) relative to standards that serve to identify the relevant ideal. So understood, the term is free from the negative connotations that rise like spectres when you first consider the term. Instead, it applies without prejudice to evaluative thinking wherever it might be found.

So thinking critically means asking questions. Instead of accepting at face value what you read or hear, critical thinkers look for evidence and for good reasons before believing something to be true. This is at the heart of what it means to be a scientist, researcher, scholar or professional in any field. Whatever you are studying, critical thinking is the key to learning and to making progress. The term of critical thinking can also as the ability to think clearly and rationally. It includes the ability to engage in reflective and independent thinking. Someone with critical thinking skills is able to do the following:

1. Understand the logical connections between ideas
2. Identify, construct and evaluate arguments
3. Detect inconsistencies and common mistakes in reasoning
4. Solve problems systematically
5. Identify the relevance and importance of ideas
6. Reflect on the justification of one's own beliefs and values

Facione in Piaw (2004: 65) stated that critical thinking means making reasoned judgement or evaluations using the left hemisphere of the brain. In essence, critical

thinking is a disciplined manner of thought that a person uses to assess the validity of something (statements, news stories, arguments, research, etc.). Critical thinking, then, must allow for the existence of ambiguities, vagueness, and misunderstandings in our communications. A person who tries to think critically must endeavour to eliminate those factors as much as possible; for example, by trying to get key terms clearly defined early on rather than allowing a debate to proceed with people using the same words to talk about completely different concepts. The essential aspects of critical thinking are:

1. Dispositions: Critical thinkers are sceptical, open-minded, value fair-mindedness, respect evidence and reasoning, respect clarity and precision, look at different points of view, and will change positions when reason leads them to do so.
2. Criteria: To think critically, must apply criteria. Need to have conditions that must be met for something to be judged as believable. Although the argument can be made that each subject area has different criteria, some standards apply to all subjects.
3. Argument: Is a statement or proposition with supporting evidence. Critical thinking involves identifying, evaluating, and constructing arguments.
4. Reasoning: The ability to infer a conclusion from one or multiple premises. To do so requires examining logical relationships among statements or data.
5. Point of View: The way one views the world, which shapes one's construction of meaning. In a search for understanding, critical thinkers



view phenomena from many different points of view.

6. Procedures for Applying Criteria: Other types of thinking use a general procedure. Critical thinking makes use of many procedures. These procedures include asking questions, making judgments, and identifying assumptions.

Based on the study of critical thinking from the experts, it can be concluded that critical thinking is an attempt to always use mind and decide to consider something carefully; analyze the information and opinions from several points of view a careful and sensible, character, behaviour, and still adhere to some indicators and universal intellectual standards. The characteristics associated with critical thinking disposition, the criteria, argument, discretion or thinking (reasoning), perspective (point of view), and procedures for applying criteria.

### **Reading Comprehension**

Reading comprehension is understanding a text that is read, or the process of constructing meaning from a text. Comprehension is a construction process because it involves all the elements of the reading process working together as a text is read to create a representation of the text in the reader's mind. Reading comprehension means to understand what has been read. An active thinking process depends not only on comprehension skill but also on the student's experience and prior knowledge.

The literal level is considered to the easiest level of reading comprehension, because the reader is not actually known what the author said. Reference refers to understanding of ideas and information not explicitly stated in passage. To get

inferences or implied meanings from the reading material, the students must read between lines. Inferences are ideas readers receive when they go beneath the surface to sense relationship, put face and ideas together to draw conclusion and make generalization, the detects the method of the material.

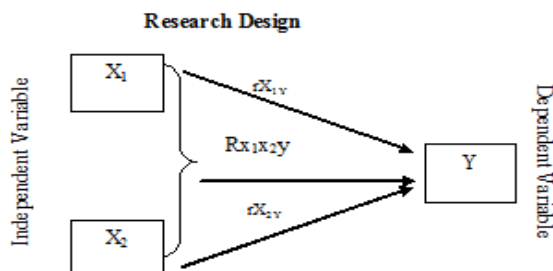
Critical refers to analyzing, evaluation and personally reacting to information presented in a passage. Critical reading requires a higher degree of skill development and perception, because it involves evaluation, the making of personal judgment on the actuary, value of what is read. It means questioning, comparing, and evaluating. Critical reading is reading with an awareness of similarities and differences between what the reader has already seen in the text. Critical reading compares previous experiences to elements in the new material such as content, style, expression, information and ideas, opinions, or values of an author.

### **Methodology**

The method used in this research is a survey method and data analysis techniques used is correlation. Frankel and Wallen (2005:397) illustrated the three major characteristics that most surveys posses, as follow:

1. The information is collected from a group of people in order to describe some aspects or characteristics of the population of which that group is a part.
2. The main way in which the information is collected is through asking questions, and the answers to these questions by the members of the group constitute the data of the study.

Information is collected from a sample rather than from every member of the population. And the relation of the variables involved could be determined by calculating correlation coefficients or by preparing contingency tables.



Note :

$X_1$  = Independent variable<sub>1</sub> : A symbol of Sentence Structure Mastery

$X_2$  = Independent variable<sub>2</sub> : A symbol of Critical Thinking

$Y$  = Dependent variable : A symbol of Student's Reading Comprehension

### Findings

The purpose of this research is to find out the effect of sentence structure mastery and critical thinking on student's reading comprehension. The ratio among variables will be used to cultivate other formulation to prove how significant the effect between sentence structure mastery and critical thinking on the student's reading comprehension at the end of the research. On the basis of its differentiation, the research will be more appropriate to be compared specifically whether sentence structure mastery and critical thinking affect student's comprehension on reading.

There are some following descriptions can be drawn on the basis of this research.

Based on the analysis of data, whole of the result of the research can be stated as follow:

1. There are significant effects of sentence structure mastery ( $X_1$ ) and critical thinking ( $X_2$ ) on student's reading comprehension ( $Y$ ). It can be seen from the result of the multiple regression where the multiple correlation coefficient ( $R$ ) is 0.692 and coefficient determination of 47.9%. And from the regression analysis acquired the equation of regression line  $\hat{Y} = 20.609 + 0.364 X_1 + 0.313 X_2$ . The constant score = 20.609, while the score of coefficient regression of 0.364 and 0.313. From the quantitative information and theory, the researcher draws a conclusion that sentence structure mastery and critical thinking have a significant effect on reading comprehension.
2. There is significant effect of sentence structure mastery on student's reading comprehension. The result is supported by the number of correlation coefficient of  $X_1$  to  $Y$ . From the hypothesis test acquired the score of  $Sig = 0.005$  and  $t_{test} = 2.957$  while  $t_{table} = 1.672$ . Because the score of  $Sig < 0.05$  and  $t_{test} > t_{table}$  so  $H_0$  is denied. From the quantitative information and theory, the researcher draws a conclusion that sentence structure mastery has a significant effect on reading comprehension.
3. There is significant effect of critical thinking on student's reading comprehension. The result is supported by the number of correlation coefficient of  $X_2$  to  $Y$ . From the hypothesis test acquired the score of  $Sig = 0.011$  and  $t_{test} =$

2.643 while  $t_{table} = 1.672$ . Because the score of  $Sig < 0,05$  and  $t_{test} > t_{table}$  so  $H_0$  is denied. From the quantitative information and theory, the researcher draws a conclusion that critical thinking has a significant effect on reading comprehension.

## CONCLUSION

There are many factors affect someone's reading skills. One of them is about knowledge sentence. This type of knowledge sentence is formulated in sentence structure, namely a set of relationship between words that produce a statement, question, or a specific formula. A sentence structure, in turn, will set the position of each word in a sentence. Though the sentence structure in a reading has been well organized, it does not mean that the reader can understand and perceive the information in the sentence easily. Readers should also use sufficient knowledge to process and understand written information they have read. In such situations, it is certain that without the knowledge of types of sentences with proper structure, a person will not be able to understand and comprehend the message unit is formulated in each sentence is read.

Reading is not general ability, but a composite of many specific abilities. It is therefore necessary to break down general comprehension into the specific skill which together constitutes it. It is necessary to inquire how well the students are able to grasp the general meaning of the passage, follow directions, organize what they read and classifies ideas, visualize what they have read and how well they can locate information. Good reading requires good thinking. When we teach reading, especially in the beginning

stages, we must teach good thinking. Sentence structure mastery and critical thinking are the two things which have close relationship with reading comprehension that should be completely mastered by a student, and interconnected between one and another. A good mastery of the sentence can be related to one's thought processes. Person's thought processes can be related to the mastery of the sentence. So it is with reading comprehension may be associated with the control sentences, critical thinking, and mastery of one's sentence and critical thinking.

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