



The Influence of Students' Critical Thinking towards Their Reading Comprehension Ability

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Abstract. Reading comprehension is essential in English learning, but many students still face difficulties despite having good basic skills. Previous studies often separated the discussion of critical thinking and reading comprehension, leaving a gap in understanding their relationship, especially in EFL contexts. This study aims to investigate how students' critical thinking skills on their reading comprehension. Using a quantitative correlational design, data were collected through questionnaires and comprehension tests involving 65 eleventh-grade students from SMAN 8 Purworejo. The findings reveal a moderate but significant correlation ($r = 0.459$, $\text{sig.} = 0.000$), with critical thinking contributing 21.1% to reading comprehension ($R \text{ square} = 0.211$). The study concludes that enhancing critical thinking skills can improve students' reading comprehension. Thus, English educators should adopt student-centered approaches that integrate critical thinking to support deeper reading engagement and better academic performance.

Keywords: Critical thinking, Reading comprehension, Education, EFL

1. INTRODUCTION

Language is an important part when developing four language skills, namely speaking, listening, reading, and [1]. Basic skills in English are the skills that form the basis for learning English as a whole. In addition to basic skills, critical thinking skills are one of the most important skills for students to master, especially in the context of academic success. One of the main targets in national education is to encourage students to develop into individuals who have critical thinking skills [2][3]. Although in the process of learning English as a foreign language, it is possible that some students experience obstacles or problems in learning English [4]. This problem is further exacerbated by the limited hours of lessons and the status of English education which is not mandatory at the elementary level [5]. Students still need help to understand English texts which are very important to keep up with global developments [6]. Lack of desire to learn is one of the main problems. In addition, student attitudes, family support, and the classroom environment significantly affect reading comprehension results [7]. Supporting skills, including critical thinking skills, are needed to help students overcome learning barriers and improve their understanding of subject matter, especially in English language learning [8-11]. This is an obstacle for students in developing language skills, especially in reading comprehension which is a crucial aspect in being able to access and understand information at the global level [12].

Critical thinking skill is one of the important skills that students must have in facing the challenges of education in the 21st century which is full of change and complexity [13]. At the high school level, this ability has an important role in helping students understand the contents of reading texts in depth [14]. In addition, critical thinking is also a basic skill that is very useful in the learning process in the classroom, because it can increase the effectiveness of learning and encourage students to be more actively involved in daily activities, both in the school environment and outside the classroom [15]. Critical thinking is part of a person's metacognitive abilities, where this ability is reflected in their habits of thinking systematically, directed, and reflectively in evaluating and verifying every information received [16] [17]. Critical thinking is a skill acquired from various actions, such as (1) interpretation, the capacity to classify the problems faced, (2) analysis, the capacity to understand universal ideas by breaking them down into more manageable and specific components, (3) interface, the capacity to consider or challenge options, come to conclusions, solve problems, and make choices, (4) Explanation is the capacity to identify arguments, present analytical findings, and explain problems. (5) assessment,

considering the points raised, (6) exercising self-control, conducting self-analysis, and self-correction [18]-[19].

Students who have critical thinking skills are able to demonstrate the ability to formulate questions appropriately and relevantly, convey information clearly, efficiently, and contextually, and make decisions based on logical and rational considerations regarding information that is considered true or doubtful. They also tend to be objective in assessing a problem and are able to draw consistent conclusions and based on mature analysis during the problem-solving process [20] [21]. The process of developing critical thinking skills cannot be done instantly, but requires time, consistency, and continuous effort so that the results can be seen in real terms [22]. This ability is important to develop because it contributes greatly to increasing students' active participation in the learning process [23] [24]. Therefore, critical thinking skills must be presented clearly, taught using appropriate techniques, acquired through experience, and practiced consistently [25]. Student-centered learning, which gives students the freedom to think for themselves, voice their own opinions, and investigate topics based on their interests and curiosity, is a useful strategy to help this. This strategy can foster an environment that encourages the growth of critical thinking skills [26].

In addition to critical thinking skills, there is one component in English learning for all students, namely reading comprehension skills that require students to be able to read written texts, interpret words, and identify the meaning of words [27]. In an increasingly complex society, reading skills are becoming increasingly crucial. According to Astri [28], reading comprehension is a process of capturing and understanding the meaning of messages conveyed through writing. This ability is very important because almost all aspects of life are related to reading activities [29]. However, in this study, the researchers only focus on the critical thinking factor on students' reading comprehension skills.

Reading comprehension skills are essential for learning new things and gaining extensive information and knowledge. Reading comprehension is a multifaceted process that involves decoding text, interpreting meaning, and connecting it to prior knowledge [30]. Reading comprehension skills can be trained by actively reading and interacting with books, asking questions about topics and main characters, summarizing texts, and connecting various texts and themes. Granda and Ramírez-Avila explain that reading comprehension is the act of processing and understanding a text. This allows readers to make connections between prior knowledge and similar or new content to understand it. Activities that can improve reading comprehension are repeated reading, timed reading, and enhanced speed reading [10], [31]-[33]. With good reading comprehension skills, we can obtain information, make decisions, solve problems, and develop creativity and innovation more effectively. Reading comprehension activities are activities in understanding a writing [32]-[35].

This study aims to explore how critical thinking skills affect students' reading comprehension abilities, especially in the context of learning English as a foreign language. This study specifically examines how critical thinking functions as an additional capacity that greatly enhances students' comprehension, analysis, and interpretation of textual materials. Furthermore, this study examines how critical thinking skills can enhance students' engagement in the learning process, help them overcome English language barriers, and improve their academic achievement in challenging learning environments. Meanwhile, the benefits of this study are expected to provide meaningful insights for various stakeholders in the field of education. For teachers, this study can be a reference in implementing student-centered learning strategies that not only focus on language skills but also integrate the development of critical thinking in the classroom. By fostering critical thinking, teachers can encourage students to be more independent, reflective, and active in their learning process. For students, this study is expected to raise awareness of the importance of critical thinking in understanding texts and improve overall learning outcomes. In addition, the results of this study can be a foundation for future researchers who are interested in examining the relationship between critical thinking and other language skills, or to test the effectiveness of various teaching methods in improving reading comprehension and critical thinking in EFL learning environments.

Although previous studies have discussed an importance of the critical thinking skills and reading comprehension skills separately, there is still limited research that specifically links students' critical thinking skills with their reading comprehension skills in the context of learning English as a foreign language (EFL), especially at the high school level. Most studies emphasize the development of reading skills through conventional teaching strategies, but not many have examined in depth how students' critical thinking skills can affect their understanding of reading texts. Therefore, this study presents a novelty by focusing on the direct influence of the critical thinking skills in reading comprehension of grade XI students at SMAN 8 Purworejo in the 2023/2024 academic year. Another novelty lies in the

local context and an approach that emphasizes student-centered learning, which aims to integrate the development of critical thinking into the English learning process more effectively and applicatively.

2. METHOD

This research uses a quantitative correlational design to test the effect of students' critical thinking skills on their reading comprehension. This study has two variables, namely independent variables and dependent variables. The dependent variables are students' reading comprehension and students' critical thinking skills as independent variables. Quantitative research is a method that collects data in the form of numbers and is designed with detailed operational steps. Often, this research involves environmental manipulation to see the effect of one variable on another [38].

The population of the study include all students of grade XI at SMA Negeri 8 Purworejo, totaling seven classes. The sample was selected using purposive sampling technique. From the results of the selection, classes XI-3 and XI-4 were determined as samples, with a total of 65 students, each consisting of 33 students in class XI-3 and 32 students in class XI-4.

In this study, researchers collected data through questionnaires and tests. Questionnaires were used to obtain data on critical thinking. Each statement in the questionnaire has five alternative answers to measure students' attitudes towards their reading interests. The assessment system uses a Likert Scale. Tests are used to measure students' reading comprehension skills. This test is designed based on indicators of reading comprehension skills according to relevant theories, including multiple-choice questions designed to measure students' literal, inferential, critical, and applied understanding of the text given. This test includes various types of questions, such as finding the main idea, drawing conclusions from the reading, evaluating arguments in the text, and applying information in new contexts.

Data on students' critical thinking abilities were computed using the questionnaire answers. Students' scores on the Likert scale used in the questionnaire varied from 1-100. Additionally, students' scores on reading comprehension tests were determined by counting the number of right answers they provided these scores were then translated into a range of 1-100. Following the completion of data collection, both descriptive and inferential analysis were used to examine the data. To get a general picture of the students' reading comprehension and critical thinking abilities, descriptive analysis was done. The precise goal of this study is to ascertain each variable's mean, or average value. To make sure the data satisfies the assumption of a linear connection, the first step in inferential analysis is to evaluate the linearity between the two variables. Regression analysis and correlation were used to evaluate the hypothesis. The significance and degree of the correlation between students' reading comprehension and critical thinking abilities were examined using this analysis. SPSS version 25 was used for statistical testing.

3. FINDINGS

This section presents and discusses the findings of the study regarding the relationship between students' critical thinking skills and their reading comprehension abilities.

1. *Students' critical thinking and reading comprehension*

The purpose of this study was to evaluate how students' critical thinking skills affect their reading comprehension. A test to measure reading comprehension skills and a questionnaire to measure students' critical thinking skills were used to collect data. The following achievement classification table is compiled based on the opinion of Arikunto (2009, p. 245) in cited Semi [39]. The classifications are as follows.

Table 1. Classification of achievement levels

Score	Interpretasi
80 - 100	“Very Good“
66 - 79	“Good“
56 - 65	“Sufficient“
40 - 55	“Fairly-sufficient“
30 - 39	“Low“

The outcomes of learners' critical thinking and reading comprehension are explained as shown in the following table.

Table 2. Score category variable students' critical thinking skills

Value	Level of Achievement	Frequency	Percent
80-100	VeryGood	15	23,1
66-79	Good	40	61,5
56-65	Sufficient	10	15,4
40-55	Fairly-sufficient	0	0
30-39	Low	0	0
	Total	65	100

Table 2 shows the results of the students' critical thinking skills with a score of 56-65 which is categorized as sufficient are 10 people (15.4%), with a score of 66-79 which is categorized as good are 40 people (61.5%), and with a score of 80-100 which is categorized as very good are 15 people (23.1%).

Table 3. Score category variable students' reading comprehension

Value	Level of Achievement	Frequency	Percent
80-100	Excellent	10	15,4
66-79	Good	20	30,8
56-65	Sufficient	19	29,2
40-55	Fairly-sufficient	9	13,8
30-39	Low	7	10,8
	Total	65	100

Table 3 shows that the reading comprehension of students with a score between less than 42 which is considered low is 7 people (10.8%), with a score between 42-55 which is considered good is 9 people (13.8%), with a score between 56-65 which is considered sufficient is 19 people (29.2%), with a score between 66-79 which is considered good is 20 people (20.8%), and with a score between 80-100 which is considered very good is 10 people (15.4%). The comparison of critical thinking and reading comprehension results can be seen in the table below.

Table 4. Descriptive statistics on critical thinking and reading comprehension

	Students' Critical Thinking Skills		Students' Reading Comprehension
N	Valid	65	65
	Missing	0	0
Mean		74,40	63,25
Median		75,00	64,00
Mode		75 ^a	72
Std. Deviation		8,196	14,694
Variance		67,181	215,907
Range		36	52
Minimum		60	32
Maximum		96	84

Based on Arikunto's (2009) score category, students' critical thinking skills are classified as good because the average score is 74.40, which falls within the 66–79 range. Meanwhile, students' reading comprehension is in the sufficient, with an average score of 63.25, which lies in the 56–65 range. Both variables also illustrate differences in the lowest and highest points. The minimum score for critical thinking skills is 60, which is in the sufficient category, while the minimum score for reading comprehension is 32, falling into the poor category. However, the maximum scores for both critical thinking skills and reading comprehension are in the very good category, with scores of 96 and 84, respectively.

2. The influence of critical thinking on reading comprehension

The first step before conducting a hypothesis analysis was to first ensure if there was a linear relationship pattern between critical thinking skills and reading comprehension through a linearity test. This test was conducted to ensure that both variables met the assumption of a linear relationship before further analysis was conducted.

Table 5. Results of the linearity test of critical thinking and reading comprehension
ANOVA Table

			Sig.
Students' Reading Comprehension * Students' Critical Thinking Skills	Between Groups	(Combined)	,013
		Linearity	,000
		Deviation from Linearity	,151
Within Groups			
Total			

Based on the results of the deviation from linearity test, a regression significance value of $0.151 > 0.05$. This indicates that the relationship between the two variables is in a linear model, so it can be concluded that the linearity requirements have been met. With the fulfillment of this assumption, hypothesis testing can be continued using appropriate statistical analysis. To determine the relationship between critical thinking skills and reading comprehension, correlation and regression tests were conducted. The results of the Pearson correlation test are presented in the following section.

Table 6. The Correlation of critical thinking and reading comprehension

		Critical Thinking Skills	Reading Comprehension
Students' Critical Thinking Skills	Pearson Correlation	1	,459**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		,000
	N	65	65
Students' Reading Comprehension	Pearson Correlation	,459**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,000	
	N	65	65

Table 7. Model summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	,459 ^a	,211	,198	13,157

Table 6 & 7 are the result of using Pearson of Product Moment, if $r_{count} > r_{table}$ then it is interpreted as significant. If $r_{count} > r_{table}$ with a value of 0.2443 ($df = 65 - 2 = 63$) with $\alpha = 0.05$ then the correlation coefficient is significant. From the SPSS output results, it can be seen that the significant value is $0.000 < \alpha = 0.05$, and the calculated r value = $0.459 > r_{table}$ value = 0.2441. Thus, it can be concluded that there is a relationship between the variables Students' Critical Thinking Skills, and Students' Reading Comprehension. This means that H1 is accepted, there is a relationship between the variables Students' Critical Thinking Skills, and Students' Reading Comprehension, with a correlation value of 0.459, which means that the close relation between the variables Students' Critical Thinking Skills, and Students' Reading Comprehension is included in the moderate relationship.

Table 8. ANOVA

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	2912,292	1	2912,292	16,824	,000 ^b
	Residual	10905,770	63	173,107		
	Total	13818,062	64			

- a. Dependent Variable: Students' Reading Comprehension
- b. Predictors: (Constant), Students' Critical Thinking Skills

Table 8 presents the results of the determination coefficient test. From the test, the F-value 16.824 with sig. = 0.000. Because the sig. value <0.05, Ho is rejected. This shows that critical thinking has a significant influence on reading comprehension.

Table 9. Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	2,014	15,017		,134	,894
	Students' Critical Thinking Skills	,823	,201	,459	4,102	,000

Table 9 shows the interpretation and testing of the hypothesis (H) that there is an influence of students' critical thinking skills on students' reading comprehension partially. Table 9 shows that the relationship between students' critical thinking skills and students' reading comprehension is significant with a t count of 4.102 (t count > t table = 1.99) and a Sig. value = 0.000 which is smaller than $\alpha = 0.05$. The coefficient value is positive, namely 0.823, which indicates that the direction of the correlation of students' critical thinking skills and students' reading comprehension is positive or increases by 82.3%. Thus, the hypothesis H1 which states that "students' critical thinking skills have a significant positive effect on students' reading comprehension" is **accepted**.

4. DISCUSSION

The data presented in the linearity test table indicates a significance value of $0.151 > 0.05$. This confirms that the relationship between students' critical thinking skills and reading comprehension is linear, allowing further hypothesis testing to proceed. This demonstrates that the correlation between the two variables is structured and meaningful, not merely coincidental. The research was conducted to investigate the influence of analytical thinking abilities on learners' reading comprehension, with the data analyzed using SPSS version 25.

The findings showed a moderate but significant correlation ($r = 0.459$) with a significance value of $0.000 < 0.05$, indicates a positive relationship between the two variables. Regression analysis also supports this finding, with a coefficient ($\beta = 0.823$) that is positive and statistically significant. This is in line with the opinion that students with higher critical thinking skills tend to have better text comprehension. As explained by Facione [40], critical thinking improves the ability to interpret, analyze, and evaluate information, which are important skills in reading comprehension.

Moreover, the statistical results confirmed that critical thinking contributes 21.1% to the variance in reading comprehension, suggesting its substantial role in students' academic success. According to Karimi & Veisi [41], fostering critical thinking in the classroom leads to deeper engagement with reading materials and better long-term retention of information.

Thus, it can be concluded that improving students' critical thinking skills is a strategic approach to enhancing reading comprehension. Integrating higher-order thinking activities into reading instruction could support students in processing complex texts more effectively, which aligns with modern educational demands in the 21st century. As noted by Zare & Biria [42], incorporating critical thinking strategies into reading instruction can significantly improve students' comprehension abilities.

5. CONCLUSION

The conclusion that there is a significant and positive influence of critical thinking skills on reading comprehension of grade XI students at SMA Negeri 8 Purworejo. The evidence is the results of the correlation analysis which shows an r value of 0.459 with a significance of 0.000. Thus, the higher the critical thinking skills possessed by students, the better their understanding of reading texts. However, the result of regression show the contribution of the critical thinking to reading comprehension is only 21.1%. This means that there are still 78.9% other factors that influence students' reading comprehension, such as learning motivation, self-confidence, reading interest, and learning strategies used.

This finding answers the research question that critical thinking skills do play as important role in improving students' understanding of texts, especially in the context of learning English as a foreign

language. Therefore, improving critical thinking skills needs to be a core element in the process of learning a language.

To complete, the author provides several practical suggestions. First, for English teachers at the high school level, it is recommended to integrate critical thinking training into reading learning. Teachers can design reading assignments that require students to analyze, evaluate, and interpret information from the text, rather than just understand it literally. In addition, creating an open, collaborative learning atmosphere that encourages discussion can also be an effective strategy for fostering critical thinking habits. Second, for schools and education policy makers, it is hoped that future teacher training programs will not only focus on mastering subject matter, but also on developing learning approaches based on high-level thinking skills. This is important so that teachers have the capacity to shape students who are not only academically capable, but also resilient in facing the challenges of thinking and problem solving in the 21st century.

Finally, for further researchers, it is recommended to explore other factors that influence reading comprehension, such as reading anxiety, digital literacy, or the use of metacognitive strategies, so that understanding of the reading learning process can be more comprehensive.

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