

A CRITICAL REVIEW OF ENGLISH ESSAY WRITING IN STUDIES OF CRITICAL THINKING, READING HABITS, AND SENTENCE STRUCTURE MASTERY

Ikhfi Imaniah

Universitas Muhammadiyah Tangerang

Email: ikhfiimaniah@umt.ac.id

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Abstract: In academic life, writing skill is the most important part for students because writing skill requires students to be able to think critically and develop the contents of their academic writing. Academic writing skill at University level usually develop Essay writing skill which is focus on analyzing, developing ideas, and opinion in a way that is by providing examples and evidence which can support the essay writing. However, in reality there are still many students unable to develop their main ideas and support their essay writing with evidence and facts. In this study, the samples tested were 64 semester V students using quantitative causality survey methods with path analysis to test each variable. Tests and questionnaires are included in this research. Findings show that essay writing skill simultaneously can be influenced by critical thinking, reading habits and sentence structure mastery. These correlations have implications for the research designs and measures used, and how data were collected. Many studies describe the correlation in global way but none describe the reflection of essay writing rubric on student's critical thinking. Recommendation for future research is provided.

Keywords: *Essay writing skills; critical thinking; reading habits; and mastery of sentence structure.*

INTRODUCTION

Writing skills are the most important part of academic life for students because writing skills require students to be able to think critically and develop the contents of their academic writing (Al Mubarak, 2017). However, academic writing is considered as a difficult activity for students, because the subject matter that will be reviewed by students is related to current issues. In this case, students need to understand the concepts, goals and processes of academic writing so they can see different contexts in academic writing. Based on the results of preliminary observations on the fifth semester students of the English Education Study Program Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, University of Muhammadiyah Tangerang on essay writing subject, students' academic writing skills in this semester are writing essays that require students to be able to think critically and develop their writing ideas supported by evidence or facts so that the writing they make can be justified (Rohayati, 2017).

Based on observations, there are still many fifth semester students unable to develop their main ideas and support their writing with evidence and

facts, so this problem is the basis of this research. Researcher sees that they cannot develop written ideas because their critical thinking is still not optimal, whereas academic writing besides requiring good writing skills must also maximize their critical thinking (Lin & Lin, 2018). If students can think critically, then they will be able to develop issues, provide responses, reasons, data, evidence and their opinions about the writing that they develop into an essay (Rohayati, 2017).

Another aspect of critical thinking that influences student's essay writing is clarity in providing arguments, logic and accuracy in providing evidence and examples relevant to the topic, as well as details to explain an issue (Rohayati, 2017). Fifth semester students of English Education study programs are still poor in providing data, giving examples and explaining in detail about the issues of a particular topic. They still do not realize the importance of giving an appropriate argument, developing ideas and analyzing the topics they develop into an essay. This is certainly very related to the reading habits of students, because their reading habits have an influence on academic success that will be achieved and become the basic

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goal of an education (WENR, 2019; Tegegne, 2017).

The level of education at the university, which is the most intense stage of formal education, is the period when students are required to frequently do reading activities (WENR, 2019). During reading activities require students to develop their critical language skills in writing, reading and speaking (Fatiloro, et.al 2017)

When reading is the basis for getting information and transforming it into a habit, this is called reading habit. Reading habit is the act of reading that is carried out throughout life in a constant, orderly and critical manner so that this becomes a need and source of pleasure for individuals (Gorvett, 2019). If students are accustomed to reading, it will enhance their experience and knowledge (Fatiloro, et al., 2017). So, it can be concluded that reading habits affect the results of student’s essay writing, as has been explained that writing essays requires students to be able to think critically, develop issues, provide responses, reasons, data, evidence and their opinions; it is the result of their knowledge of the topic obtained through reading habits. So, the results in this study can see the effect of critical thinking directly on student reading habits that have an impact on the results of their essay writing.

However, to be able to produce good essay writing not only develop ideas, there is also a need for sentence structure mastery because if the sentence structure developed in student’s essay writing does not have good coherence and cohesion then the meaning received by the reader will be biased (Faradhibah & Nur, 2017). So, the mastery of sentence structure is very influential on improving students’ essay writing skills. This is

reinforced by the essay writing assessment used by lecturers supporting the essay writing course; include: 1) Organization; 2) Voice; 3) Word Choice; 4) Sentence structure, grammar, mechanics & spelling; 5) Argument & Originality (Mayuni, et.al. 2020; Imaniah, 2021).

Based on the 5 essay writing criteria for sentence structure, grammar, writing mechanism and spelling, it becomes an important element to produce an English essay because if students make mistakes in preparing English sentence structure, ideas or opinions developed will not produce good messages (UNSW, 2020). Therefore, this study tests the path analysis in order to explain the effect of critical thinking, reading habits, and mastery of the sentence structure on student’s essay writing skill.

Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) for languages level of student’s English essay writing

The researcher used CEFR to measure the level of English language proficiency of the fifth semester students of the English Education Study Program at the Faculty of Teacher and Training Education, especially in developing essay writing. The advantage of CEFR is that it can determine the level of language proficiency and help colleague to describe the level of proficiency required by existing standards, test, and examinations in order to facilitate comparisons between different qualification system (Imaniah, 2021). Based on the results of the validation instrument test conducted on students in writing English essays and refer to table 1. Regarding the level of students’ essay writing skills (Council of Europe, nd), the researcher concluded that the level of English essay writing was at B1 level as a beginner level.

Table 1. *Level of essay writing skills (Council of Europe, nd.)*

Level of Proficiency	Explanation
C2	Can produce essays complex, clear, either , article or essay that generated present case, or give critical appreciation of proposals or literary works. Can provides a logical structure appropriate and effective which helps readers find important points.
C1	Can write exposition complex subject and a clear, structured, underlined the important issues that are relevant. Can broaden and support a broad perspective with additional points, reasons and examples that are relevant.
B2	Can write essays or reports that develop arguments systematically by highlighting key points and relevant supporting details precisely.

Level of Proficiency	Explanation
	Can evaluate various ideas or solutions to a problem .
	Can write essays or reports that develop arguments, give reasons to support or oppose certain points of view and explain the advantages and disadvantages of various choices.
	Can synthesize information and arguments from a number of source.
B1	Can write short and simple essays on interesting topics. Can summarize, report, and give his opinion on the accumulation of factual information about routine and non-routine matters that are prevalent in his field with confidence.
	Can write an essay very brief, reporting and give factual information and state the reasons for what has been described.
A2	No descriptor available
A1	No descriptor available

At level B1, fifth semester students can write simple short essays on selected topics by giving their opinions based on information obtained but have not been able to develop strong arguments to support or oppose certain points of view and they have been able to synthesize information and arguments from a number of sources. After knowing the level of proficiency in writing English essays of students, the researcher then determined the criteria for the assessment of essay writing skills in accordance with the level of proficiency and variable criteria in this study.

Assessing English essay writing by developing student's critical thinking

In developing an English essay, students eager to get the best result, so they need to make sure everything is right: the way they write, the use of evidence, and critical analysis. Students also need to change and edit their essay writing to ensure there are no mistakes. So, to get the best result there are several things that must be considered, they are: 1) Organization, 2) Voice, 3) Word choice, 4) Sentence Structure, Grammar, Mechanics & Spelling, 5) Argument & Originality (Mayuni, et.al. 2020; Imaniah, 2021). In developing an essay, knowledge of the structure of its composition is needed, yet the results of the writing are expressed into interesting writings that are readable and relevant to the existence of examples, evidence and strong arguments (Imaniah, 2021).

When describing the contents of essay writing, it can be seen the writer's knowledge or experience in providing examples and elaborating between the knowledge and experience provided with the evidence contained. Evidence must be strong and reliable, because evidence is used as a reference to

strengthen the essay developed. Furthermore, in developing an essay, the preparation of sentence structure, grammar, writing and spelling mechanisms are important points in producing good messages because essays are developed using English. So, the choice of words in developing an essay must be precise, natural and not biased, and provide good variations of writing in accordance with the knowledge and experience of the author.

Based on the presentation on the essay writing skills assessment, the researcher concluded those five essay writing skills assessment criteria are in accordance with the process and structure of a good essay writing so that it can be used as a reference criterion for writing English essays. In addition, the essay writing assessment also includes 8 criteria, namely: 1) understanding the audience; 2) introduction; 3) thesis / arrangement of main ideas; 4) contents / evidence and examples; 5) closing paragraph; 6) structuring sentences; 7) connecting language; 8) grammar and spelling (Beare, 2018). In understanding the audience, the writer must be able to demonstrate a keen understanding of the target audience and use appropriate vocabulary and language. Anticipate the possibility of questions and overcome this problem with evidence related to the likelihood of readers' assumption. So, in presenting the introductory paragraph, the writer starts with statements that are both of interest to the reader and appropriate for the audience. The introductory paragraph should contain the main idea clear about the main idea with clear suggestions on how the content of the essay will support the main idea of this.

In short, the researcher concludes writing essays means the rules that systematically use a reference book as a reference the idea of writing so that in the

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process of writing an essay is not based on the writer's description, but a synthesis of various quotations theory and any relevant examples. However, the essay evaluation described by Staffaroni only covers 4 aspects of assessment, namely: 1) ideas / analysis; 2) development of essay content; 3) preparation of essays; and 4) use of language (Staffaroni, 2018). The details can be described as follows:

Idea / analysis. The writer produces arguments that critically involve various perspectives on a given problem. This thesis of argument reflects nuance and accuracy in thought and purpose. This argument establishes and uses insightful contexts for the analysis of problems and their perspectives. This analysis examines the implications, complexities and tensions, and / or the underlying values and assumptions.

Development of essay content. The development of ideas deepens insight and broadens context. This is integrated with skilled thinking and illustrations that effectively convey the importance of arguments. Qualifications and complications enrich and support the ideas and analysis of an essay.

Preparation of essay. The response shows a skillful essay preparation strategy. The response was unified by an idea or purpose control, and the development of logical idea to increase the effectiveness argument by the author. Transitions between and within paragraphs strengthen the relationship of a writer's ideas.

Use of language. The use of language increases the quality of an argument. The structure of sentences varies consistently and clearly. Style and list choices, including sound and tone, are strategic and effective. While some minor errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics may be present, they do not change the reader's understanding. Idea and arguments are needed in developing an essay, the student needs to refer to a variety of books, journals, and other materials to support the ideas and arguments that will they develop in an essay. Not just developing an idea and argument, but they also have to understand the rules of writing an essay as a guide so that their essay is more directed. The essay grading rubric becomes necessary to ensure that students write and develop essays within their limits. So, things that must be considered in compiling an essay are: 1) focus / detail, 2) content,

3) ideas, 4) word choice, 5) sentence structure, grammar, writing & spelling mechanism.

Assessing critical thinking

Measuring students' critical thinking becomes the most important part of knowing their literacy skills. Besides identifying the factors that influence the development of students' critical thinking, it also needs to be done to prepare students to become graduates who are superior and ready to compete with other universities (Indah, 2017). However, it is not sufficient for the students to know that critical thinking is the key skills of reading and writing, they also need to know why and how to think critically useful for their general development as a great student. In this way, students do not necessarily adopt the academic conventions of a Western university, but consciously results of tests of critical thinking provide the greatest benefit from their learning outcomes. Because critical thinking tests assess the ability of students to make conclusions and assumptions and require them to think logically by giving strong arguments (Glaser & Watson, 2015).

The critical thinking test adopted from Glaser and Watson consists of five aspects: 1) interpreting information; 2) assumptions; 3) deduction; 4) argumentation; and 5) conclusions. In interpreting information, questions consist of an information section, followed by a series of conclusions. Students are instructed to assume all information in that section is true. The task is to assess whether each of the conclusions proposed logically provide reasonable information provided in the paragraph or not. While the assumption is something that is assumed or taken for granted. Each statement will be followed by a series of assumptions put forward and students must decide which assumptions are logically justified based on the evidence in the statement.

Furthermore, in the measurement of critical thinking, students must be able to draw conclusions from general conditions; inference from general to special, this is called deduction. A statement is followed by a series of conclusions suggested. Here, students must assume that statement is true. After reading each conclusion below the statement, the students must decide whether they think that the specific conclusion follows from the statement given or not. Then students are also able to provide

arguments when making important decisions, it will be useful to be able to distinguish between strong arguments and weak arguments. Strong arguments will be directly related to questions, while weak arguments are not directly related to questions, or not very important. Weak arguments might also be related to small aspects of the question, or correlations with causation (incorrectly assuming that because two things are related, they cause each other to occur).

The last point is making conclusions drawn from observed or suspected facts. The questions in this part of the test begin with a statement of fact that must be assumed to be true. After each statement, will be presented with conclusions that may be drawn from the facts in the statement. Analyze each conclusion separately and decide on the level of truth. In this series of questions, each question is followed by a series of arguments. For this section students must determine whether the statements submitted are strong arguments or weak arguments (Glaser & Watson, 2015).

Based on five aspects of the critical thinking test developed by Glaser & Watson, the researcher concluded that the measurement of critical thinking trains students to be able to interpret information, analyze and provide assumptions and arguments according to the level of critical thinking possessed by students. This is in accordance with the process of critical thinking, namely: 1) interpretation, 2) evaluation, 3) analysis, 4) synthesis, and 5) reasoning. It can be concluded that critical thinking is the ability or skill in selecting, evaluating, analyzing, and reflecting questions, conclusions and assessments. Critical thinking is demonstrated through the ability of students to identify problems and assumptions, recognize important relationships, make correct conclusions, evaluate evidence or authority, and draw conclusions.

In short, critical thinking is the ability to review a situation or problem by interpreting information, giving assumptions, formulating something, describing arguments, and generating conclusions on what is analyzed systematically.

Assessing reading habits

There are four aspects that can measure the scale of individual habits in reading, namely: (1) The frequency of reading, this greatly determines the tendency of one's reading activities (Loan & Shah, 2017; Ukoha, 2018). (2) Book ownership,

individuals who have the habit of reading tend to have a large collection of personal books according to their reading interest (Erdem, 2015). (3). Enjoy reading activities will be fun if someone likes to read and has become a thing that is often done in everyday life. (4) The selection of reading themes becomes an important component in reading activities, for examples politics, academics, or reading for fun things like comics or novels (Davidovitch et al., 2016).

Reading habits measurement can be explained through four aspects of reading habit criteria including; reading frequency, book ownership, enjoying reading activities, and selection of reading themes. Furthermore, aspects of measuring reading habits can also be seen in four criteria, namely: 1) student behavior in reading activities, 2) free time provided for reading, 3) the language they choose in reading activities, 4) the purpose of reading activities (Loan, 2017)

Student behavior towards reading activities is very necessary to form a habit, they must take time to read by choosing the theme of reading they like. This explains that reading habits shape the personality of students and help them develop and create new ideas. Reading activities need to be directed into fun activities so that students can get used to reading. Besides reading habits can also be measured to explain the extent to which students are accustomed to reading by measuring the frequency of their reading activities, see the ownership of books they have, whether they enjoy the reading activities, as well as the reading themes they read.

Indicator of sentence structure mastery

When writing in a foreign language, it is important to know and review the order of words in the sentences made. Often students translate directly from their mother tongue and don't notice that the arrangement of the elements doesn't have to be the same. For example, in English sentence structure, subjects and verbs must coexist, because if not it will be possible to not be able to understand the meaning of sentences (Palazon & Aleson, nd).

This explains that not all grammar in grammatical aspects is universal. A clear way to determine what aspects of sentence are mastered from students' English is by measuring their mastery of sentence by giving a test. Sentence mastery indicators consist of: 1) sentence ambiguity, 2) preparation of the sentence

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movement, 3) knowledge of phrases, 4) identify phrases or clauses in sentences, 5) identify the sentence structure, 6) working with other languages, 7) complete sentences (Fabb, nd; Lincoln University, 2018).

Based on the indicators of sentence structure mastery, it is necessary to have knowledge about the ambiguity of sentence structure, the preparation of good sentence structure, knowledge of phrases, being able to identify phrases or clauses in sentences, identifying the composition of good sentence structure, distinguishing the arrangement of English with Indonesia, and completing sentence structure well.

As for the grammar assessment sentence rubric, which need to be considered in mastering sentence structure are: 1) capital letters, sentences must begin with capital letters and have no capitalization errors; 2) spelling, all words spelled correctly; 3) punctuation, sentences have the correct end punctuation (commas and other punctuation are used correctly); 4) grammar; grammatically correct sentences without errors; 5) conjunctions, compound sentence used with appropriate conjunctions and correct punctuation as well as complex sentence used correctly with the appropriate dependent and independent clause (RCampus, nd). So, this gives an understanding that a sentence has a grammatical rule that must be understood. In linguistics, grammar is called syntax or sentence structure. If students master the rules of English sentences, students can arrange English sentences well.

In composing a sentence in English, students need to pay attention to the indicators of mastery of sentence structure, among others: 1) ambiguity of sentence structure, sentences that are compiled are correct and do not have ambiguity so that the meaning contained in the sentence can be interpreted properly, 2) arrangement of sentences, students use appropriate conjunctions so that in composing a sentence there is cohesion and coherence between paragraphs that are developed, 3) knowledge of phrases, students are not confused between phrases and clauses in preparing a sentence, and 4) identify phrases or clauses in sentences.

METHOD

The method used in this study is the quantitative survey method of causality. Causality assumes that the value of an interdependent variable is the reason for the value of a dependent variable (Allen, 2017). This study examines and analyzes the relationship between research variables and measures one variable with another variable. The research variables consisted of four variables: (1) critical thinking, (2) reading habits, (3) mastery of sentence structure, and (4) English essay writing skills.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The following results are the selection of data through research instruments that have been tested. The results of the full descriptive analysis are presented in the following table:

Table 2. *Summary of statistical calculation description*

Variable	N	Descriptive Statistic			
		MIN	MAX	MEAN	SD
Y	64	25	90	70,09	12,833
X ₁	64	13	50	22,48	5,451
X ₂	64	49	88	67,19	7,831
X ₃	64	15	90	52,89	18,366

Student's performance on English essay writing, critical thinking, reading habits, and sentence structure mastery

Student's Performances

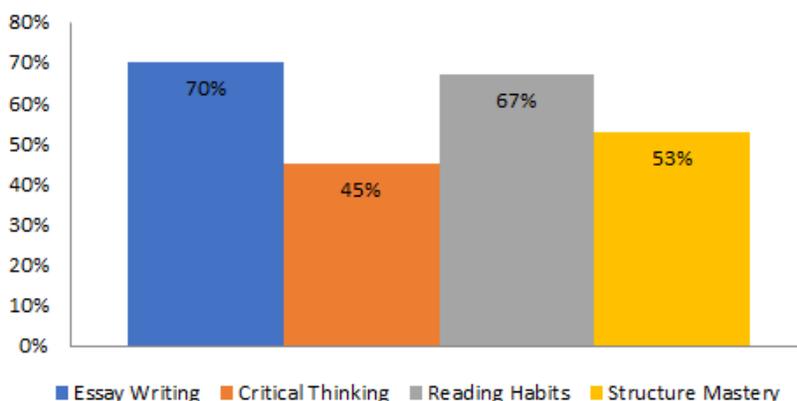


Figure 1. Student's performance on English essay writing, critical thinking, reading habits, and sentence structure mastery

Hypothesis testing

Table 3. Summary of hypothesis testing result with SPSS

Direct Variable	Effect Between	Path Coefficient (P _{ij})	T _{count}	pvalue	Conclusion
X ₁ to Y (P _{y1})		0,111	2,207	0,023	Sig.
X ₂ to Y (P _{y2})		0,130	2,113	0,027	Sig.
X ₃ to Y (P _{y3})		0,364	3,301	0,002	Sig.
X ₁ to X ₃ (P ₃₁)		0,455	2,115	0,027	Sig.
X ₂ to X ₃ (P ₃₂)		0,650	2,419	0,007	Sig.
X ₁ to X ₂ (P ₂₁)		0,815	2,644	0,005	Sig.

Based on the data of hypothesis testing, critical thinking is closely related to the essay writing process, because when students write they must use ideas and be able to solve problems by combining their linguistic knowledge and abilities (RN Indah & Kusuma, 2016). Critical thinking will provide opportunities for students to interpret their opinions by developing ideas, testing the information obtained, and concluding and evaluating their arguments. In this study found that critical thinking had a direct positive effect on English essay writing skills. This supports the first hypothesis proposed in this study which proves that there is a direct influence of critical thinking on English essay writing skills. Thus, the higher critical thinking skills of students the better their English essay writing skills.

It can be concluded that critical thinking is very closely related to the essay writing process, because when students write they must use ideas and be able to solve problems by combining their linguistic knowledge and abilities). At the same time of writing an essay, they are also required to think critically by providing strong and logical

argumentation and analysis (Lin & Lin, 2018). The influence of critical thinking on essay writing skills is very significant because if students are able to think critically then the essay writing produced will have clarity in argumentation, logical and relevant to the topic as well as details in providing examples and evidence as references.

Moreover, reading habits had a direct positive effect on English essay writing skills and supported the second hypothesis proposed in this study, which was to prove that there was a direct effect of reading habits on English essay writing skills. Thus, students must be accustomed to reading to be able to improve their essay writing skills. The findings of this study refuse the results of research conducted by Lestari, Sofendi, and Petrus that reading habits negatively affect writing skills. When students' reading habits improve, their writing skills will decrease and vice versa (Lestari et al., 2018).

However, current research supports the results of Khoirunnisa and Safitri's research that reading habits have a positive effect on improving students' academic writing skills (Khoirunnisa & Safitri, 2018). Thus, as students' reading habits improve,

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their writing skills will increase and vice versa. Writing activities at the University level usually write essays that are discursive and analytical. They need to write essays according to the correct process and to refer carefully and accurately by looking for sources of reading through the internet, campus libraries or academic databases. Looking for references is much related to reading activities because this is the basis for consideration to get information. If students are accustomed to reading, it will enhance their experience and knowledge. So that if students are more accustomed to reading, then they will be able to develop ideas and ideas as well as their knowledge and experience in the essay.

The third hypothesis proposed in this study which proves that there is a positive direct effect on the mastery of sentence structure on English essay writing skills. Thus, mastering the sentence structure, the better their English essay writing skills. In improving the quality of essay writing, good mastery of sentence is needed, because if the sentence structure developed in student essay writing does not have good coherence and cohesion, the message received by the reader will be biased (Faradhibah & Nur, 2017).

When writing essays in English, it is important to know and review the order of the words in the sentence that was made; otherwise it will be possible to not be able to understand the meaning of the sentence. So there needs to be an understanding of the type of sentence structure. Therefore, the current research supports the results of research conducted by Pao that knowledge of sentence structure greatly influences writing skills (Pao, 2016).

The arrangement of English sentences, the subject and verb must coexist, because if not then it will be possible to not be able to understand the meaning of the sentence that has been compiled. This explains that not all grammar in grammatical aspects is universal. A clear way to determine what aspects of sentence are mastered from students' English is by measuring their mastery of sentence by giving a test.

Measurement of mastery of English sentence structure requires students to understand the rules of sentence structure in English because the arrangement of elements is different from Mother tongue. This gives an understanding that in carrying out the test of mastery of sentence structure requires

the ability to think critically, because critical thinking is the key to reading and writing skills that are useful for their general development as students.

The fifth hypothesis proposed in this study which proves that there is a direct influence of reading habits on mastery of sentence structure. Thus, the more students accustomed to reading, their mastery of sentence structure will increase. The students' grammar mastery is a result of their reading habits. If students are accustomed to reading, their vocabulary and mastery of sentence structure increases (Celik, 2017). In addition, reading activities in English discourse requires students to carry out two activities at the same time, formulating words and sentence structure and constructing combined meanings in the sentence.

The sixth hypothesis proposed in this study which proves that there is a direct influence of critical thinking on reading habits. As a skill, critical thinking is not instant knowledge to get someone but sometimes unconsciously everyday life requires a critical thinking process. By training students to be able to think critically will help them in the learning process, improve and consolidate students' understanding of a subject and give them the opportunity to control their own learning which leads to increased self-confidence.

One of the factors increasing student confidence is to have experience and knowledge in a variety of things obtained by reading activities. Reading activities and reading habits are the same thing, meaning that there is a need for habituation from an early age to recognize reading activities so that an individual can get used to reading. Reading habits possessed by students must be able to improve their critical thinking, because reading activities at the university level are reading activities that criticize a discourse. In this case, teachers are required to help students develop the way their critical thinking, because a number of the issues discussed in class demands critical thinking, students are encouraged to express their views, experience, and knowledge openly and it is obtained by reading habits they have. In addition to provide extensive and deep experience and knowledge, reading habits also support students to achieve their academic success.

Based on the elaboration of the results, there has been no previous research that has tested the hypothesis of path analysis regarding the influence of critical thinking, reading habits and mastery of

sentence structure on essay writing skills. So that the results obtained in this study are purely as original studies that provide a thorough and detailed explanation that describes the effect between each variable.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of research and discussion, it can be concluded the following conclusions of the study: (1) There is a positive direct effect of critical thinking on student's English essay writing skills which means that the higher student's critical thinking, the better their English essay writing skills will be. (2) There is a positive direct effect of reading habits on student's English essay writing skills which gives an understanding that if students are accustomed to reading then their English essay writing skills will increase. (3) There is a positive direct effect on sentence grammar mastery on student's English essay writing skills, which means that the higher student's sentence structure mastery, the higher their English essay writing skills. (4) There is a positive direct effect of critical thinking on the mastery of student's sentence structure, thus providing an understanding that if the student's critical thinking score is high then they have high score on sentence structure mastery. (5) There is a positive direct effect on reading habits on student's sentence mastery; this means that the higher student's reading habits, the higher their sentence mastery will be. (6) There is a positive direct effect on the reading habits of critical thinking of students, it means the higher score of critical thinking of students, the higher their reading habits will be.

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