CEFR LEVEL OF READING PASSAGES IN *MERDEKA CURRICULUM* ENGLISH TEXTBOOK ENTITLED "SMART PATH TO LEARNING ENGLISH" FOR GRADE XI SMK/MAK

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ABTRACT

The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum has encouraged the integration of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) into English language education in Indonesia. As one of the primary learning resources, English textbooks are expected to provide reading materials that correspond to the target CEFR level specified in the English Learning Outcomes (Capaian Pembelajaran). This study aimed (1) to identify the CEFR levels of the selected reading passages in the Smart Path to Learning English (SPLASH 2) textbook using the Pearson GSE Text Analyzer and (2) to determine whether the identified CEFR levels were aligned with the English Learning Outcomes of Phase F. This study employed a descriptive quantitative research design. The data consisted of all six main reading passages in the SPLASH 2 textbook for Grade XI SMK/MAK, which were included using total sampling. The reading passages were analyzed using the Pearson GSE Text Analyzer, which generated Global Scale of English (GSE) scores and corresponding CEFR levels. The results were interpreted based on Pearson's official GSE–CEFR Alignment and the CEFR Companion Volume. The findings revealed that four reading passages (66.7%) were classified at the B2 level, while two passages (33.3%) were classified at the B2+ level. According to Pearson's official alignment, B2+ falls within the B2 CEFR band. Therefore, all six passages were interpreted as B2. Furthermore, none of the selected reading passages matched the target CEFR level of B1 specified for Phase F. Consequently, all six passages (100%) were categorized as not aligned. These findings indicate that the selected reading passages exceeded the expected proficiency level and highlight the importance of evaluating textbook materials using standardized CEFR-based frameworks to support curriculum alignment and appropriate language learning materials

Keywords : *CEFR, English Textbook, Merdeka Curriculum, Pearson GSE, SMK/MAK*

INTRODUCTION

The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum *(Kurikulum Merdeka)* by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemendikbudristek, 2022) has introduced significant changes to English language education in Indonesia. One of its major features is the adoption of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) as an international framework for describing students' English language proficiency. The integration of CEFR aims to ensure that English learning outcomes are measurable and comparable with international standards.

According to the English Learning Outcomes *(Capaian Pembelajaran)* issued by the *Badan Standar, Kurikulum, dan Asesmen Pendidikan* (BSKAP, 2025), English instruction is organized according to learning phases. For Phase F, which covers Grades XI and XII of vocational high schools (SMK/MAK), students are expected to achieve CEFR B1 proficiency in English. Consequently, English textbooks should provide reading materials that correspond to this expected proficiency level to support students in achieving the intended learning outcomes.

Textbooks remain one of the primary instructional resources in English language teaching. Richards (2001) described textbooks as the backbone of language teaching because they provide organized learning materials, language input, and classroom activities. In the Indonesian EFL context, teachers rely heavily on textbooks as their primary teaching resource (Santi et al., 2024). Therefore, the linguistic quality and difficulty level of textbook reading passages have a direct influence on students' reading comprehension and language development.

According to Cunningsworth (1995), an effective textbook should be appropriate for learners' needs, language proficiency, and curriculum objectives. One of the key principles of textbook evaluation is determining whether the language level of learning materials matches the proficiency level of the target learners. When reading passages are too difficult or too easy, they may not effectively support students' language development or the achievement of the intended learning outcomes. Therefore, evaluating the CEFR levels of textbook reading passages is an important aspect of textbook evaluation, particularly in the context of the *Merdeka Curriculum*, where CEFR serves as the reference for English language proficiency.

One of the English textbooks designed for Grade XI vocational high school students is Smart Path to Learning English (SPLASH 2), published by Erlangga. Since this textbook is intended for Phase F students, its reading passages should correspond to the expected CEFR B1 proficiency level. However, whether the reading passages in SPLASH 2 actually match the expected proficiency level remains unclear. If the linguistic complexity of the reading texts exceeds students' language proficiency, learners may experience difficulties in comprehending the texts and achieving the intended learning outcomes. Conversely, if the texts are too easy, they may not provide sufficient language challenge to support students' language development. Therefore, evaluating the CEFR levels of the reading passages is necessary to determine their suitability for Phase F students.

To evaluate the language level of reading materials, several automated text analysis tools have been developed. One of the most widely recognized is the Pearson GSE Text Analyzer, which estimates the CEFR level of written texts based on their lexical and grammatical characteristics. The analyzer provides standardized results by assigning a GSE score and a corresponding CEFR

level according to Pearson's official GSE–CEFR alignment. As a result, it has become a useful tool for evaluating the linguistic appropriateness of English learning materials.

Previous studies have reported that the CEFR levels of English textbook reading passages often exceed the proficiency level expected by the curriculum. Kamil (2023) found that most reading passages in a Grade X English textbook were classified above the expected B1 level. Similarly, Yani et al. (2025) reported that the majority of reading passages in the Grade XI English for Change textbook were categorized at B2 or higher. These findings indicate that many English textbooks may not fully correspond to the proficiency level expected by the *Merdeka Curriculum*.

This issue is particularly important because textbooks remain the primary source of English instruction in many Indonesian classrooms. When the CEFR level of textbook reading passages does not correspond to the proficiency target specified in the curriculum, students may encounter learning materials that are either too difficult or insufficiently challenging. Such mismatches can reduce the effectiveness of English language learning and hinder the achievement of the expected learning outcomes. Therefore, evaluating the CEFR levels of textbook reading passages is essential to ensure that instructional materials support the successful implementation of the *Merdeka Curriculum*.

Although previous studies have investigated the CEFR levels of Indonesian English textbooks, research focusing on vocational high school textbooks remains limited. Furthermore, no published study has specifically analyzed the reading passages in SPLASH 2 using the Pearson GSE Text Analyzer or examined whether their CEFR levels are aligned with the English Learning Outcomes of Phase F in the *Merdeka Curriculum*. This study therefore offers a new contribution by examining a vocational high school textbook that has not previously been investigated and by evaluating its reading passages using the Pearson GSE Text Analyzer in relation to the curriculum's expected CEFR proficiency level.

Therefore, this study aims to identify the CEFR levels of the reading passages in SPLASH 2 using the Pearson GSE Text Analyzer and to determine whether those reading passages are aligned with the English Learning Outcomes of Phase F in the *Merdeka Curriculum*. The findings are expected to provide valuable information for English teachers, textbook developers, curriculum designers, and future researchers in selecting and developing English learning materials that are appropriate for vocational high school students.

Literature Review

CEFR and Textbook Evaluation

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), first published by the Council of Europe in 2001 and updated through the Companion Volume in 2020, provides an internationally recognized framework for describing language proficiency across six levels: A1 (Breakthrough), A2 (Waystage), B1 (Threshold), B2 (Vantage), C1 (Effective Operational Proficiency), and C2 (Mastery). Each level is characterized by a set of “can do” descriptors that specify what learners can understand and do with language at each proficiency stage (Council of Europe, 2001, 2020).

At the B1 level, which is the goal for *Merdeka Curriculum* Phase F learners, students should be able to identify and comprehend the main points of clear, standard language about familiar topics they often come across at work, school, or during free time. Students at this proficiency level are expected to manage most situations that may occur while traveling in regions where the language is spoken. They are able to produce simple, coherent texts on familiar topics or those of

personal interest. Additionally, they can describe experiences, events, dreams, hopes, and ambitions, and can briefly provide reasons and explanations for their opinions and plans. (Council of Europe, 2001).

Indonesia's adoption of the CEFR within the *Merdeka Curriculum* framework reflects a broader trend of aligning national educational standards with global language proficiency benchmarks. In this context, North (2021) highlighted that the CEFR's companion volume has enhanced the framework's applicability across diverse cultural and linguistic contexts, making it more suitable for integration into Asian educational systems. Even so, the practical operationalization of CEFR levels in textbook development remains a significant challenge, as evidenced by the misalignment findings reported in prior Indonesian studies (Kamil, 2023; Yani et al., 2025).

Table 1. CEFR Proficiency Levels

CEFR Level	User Category	Category
A1	Basic User	Can understand very short and simple texts containing familiar words and basic expressions
A2	Basic User	Can understand short and simple texts on familiar topics and identify explicit information
B1	Independent User	Can understand the main ideas and supporting details in straightforward factual texts on familiar topics
B2	Independent User	Can understand the main ideas of complex texts, follow arguments, and make inferences from written texts
C1	Proficient User	Can understand a wide range of demanding and complex texts, including implicit meanings
C2	Proficient User	Can understand virtually all forms of written texts with ease, including highly complex materials

(*Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment: Companion Volume (Council of Europe, 2020)*

The importance of evaluating textbook materials is also emphasised by Cunningsworth (1995), who argues that an effective textbook should be appropriate for learners' needs, language proficiency, and curriculum objectives. One of the key principles of textbook evaluation is determining whether learning materials match the language ability of the target learners. Therefore, CEFR provides an appropriate conceptual framework for evaluating whether the reading passages in English textbooks are suitable for students' expected proficiency level.

Pearson Global Scale of English (GSE)

The Global Scale of English (GSE), developed by Pearson, complements the CEFR by providing a more detailed proficiency scale ranging from 10 to 90. Pearson has established an official alignment between GSE scores and CEFR levels, allowing GSE results to be interpreted within the CEFR framework (Pearson, 2023).

This study employs the Pearson GSE Text Analyzer, an online tool that estimates the CEFR level of written texts based on their lexical and grammatical characteristics. The analyzer generates a GSE score and a corresponding CEFR level using Pearson's official GSE–CEFR alignment. Because it provides standardised estimates of text difficulty, the Pearson GSE Text Analyzer is considered an appropriate instrument for estimating the CEFR levels of textbook reading passages.

Table 2. General Linguistic Characteristics for Interpreting Pearson GSE Text Analyzer Result

CEFR Level	Vocabulary	Grammar & Sentence Structure	Reading Demand	Overall Text Complexity
A1	Very common everyday vocabulary	Very simple grammar and short sentences	Understand familiar words and simple information	Very simple texts on familiar everyday topics
A2	Common vocabulary related to everyday situations	Simple sentence structures with limited complexity	Identifies basic information and simple main ideas	Simple texts on familiar topics
B1	Mostly high-frequency vocabulary with some intermediate vocabulary	Moderately complex grammatical structures and sentence patterns	Identifies main ideas, supporting details, locates specific information, and makes simple inferences	Moderately complex texts suitable for independent users
B2	Broad vocabulary including less frequent words	More complex grammar and varied sentence structures	Understands detailed information, implicit meaning, and	Complex texts on both concrete and abstract topics

			relations between ideas	
C1	Sophisticated and less frequent vocabulary	Advanced and flexible grammatical structures	Interprets implicit meanings, evaluates arguments, and understands complex texts	Highly complex and well-developed texts
C2	Highly sophisticated and specialized vocabulary	Highly complex and natural language structures	Understands virtually all types of texts, including subtle nuances	Very high linguistic complexity comparable to authentic texts

(*Adapted from Pearson GSE Learning Objectives (Pearson, 2022) and Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Companion Volume (Council of Europe, 2020)*

Table 1.2 presents the general linguistic characteristics used to interpret the results of the Pearson GSE Text Analyzer. The analyzer estimates the CEFR level by analyzing linguistic features, including vocabulary, grammatical complexity, sentence structure, and overall text complexity, and then maps the results to the Global Scale of English (GSE) and CEFR. The descriptions in this table are adapted from the Pearson GSE Learning Objectives and the CEFR Companion Volume to support the interpretation of the analyzer's output.

English Learning Outcomes *(Capaian Pembelajaran)* of Phase F

The English Learning Outcomes *(Capaian Pembelajaran/CP)* are the national learning standards established by the *Badan Standar, Kurikulum, dan Asesmen Pendidikan* (BSKAP) under the *Merdeka Curriculum*. These learning outcomes specify the competencies that students are expected to achieve at the end of each learning phase and serve as the basis for curriculum implementation, learning activities, and assessment.

For English language learning, Phase F applies to senior secondary education, including vocational high schools (SMK/MAK). According to the English Learning Outcomes for Phase F, students are expected to attain the B1 level of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). At this level, learners are expected to understand the main ideas of clear standard texts on familiar topics, identify important information, interpret explicit meanings, and comprehend various types of texts related to everyday life, education, and work.

In this study, the English Learning Outcomes of Phase F serve as the benchmark for evaluating the CEFR levels of the reading passages in the SPLASH 2 English textbook. The CEFR levels identified by the Pearson GSE Text Analyzer are compared with the expected B1 level specified in the English Learning Outcomes. Reading passages classified at the B1 level are

considered aligned with the expected learning outcomes, whereas passages classified above or below the target level are considered not aligned.

Table 3. Criteria of Alignment between CEFR Levels and Phase F

Identified CEFR Level	Phase F Target	Alignment
A1	B1	Not Aligned
A2	B1	Not Aligned
B1	**B1**	**Aligned**
B2	B1	Not Aligned
C1	B1	Not Aligned
C2	B1	Not Aligned

The table above presents the alignment criteria established in this study by comparing the CEFR level identified in the reading passages with the target CEFR level of B1 for Phase F. A reading passage is categorized as aligned when its identified CEFR level corresponds to B1. In contrast, a reading passage is categorized as not aligned when its identified CEFR level is either below or above B1, including A1, A2, B2, C1, and C2. These criteria are used as the basis for determining the alignment of the selected reading passages in SPLASH 2 with the English Learning Outcomes of Phase F.

Previous Study

Several studies have investigated the CEFR levels of English textbook reading passages in Indonesia. Kamil (2023) analysed sixteen reading passages in a Grade X English textbook and found that only two texts met the expected CEFR B1 level, while the remaining passages ranged from B2 to C2. Similarly, Yani et al. (2025) reported that most reading passages in the Grade XI English for Change textbook exceeded the expected B1 proficiency level, with the majority classified as B2 or above. These findings indicate that many textbook reading passages are linguistically more difficult than the proficiency level targeted by the curriculum.

Although previous studies have examined CEFR levels in Indonesian English textbooks, research focusing on vocational high school textbooks remains limited. In particular, no published study has analysed the reading passages in the Smart Path to Learning English (SPLASH 2) textbook using the Pearson GSE Text Analyzer or investigated whether their CEFR levels are aligned with the English Learning Outcomes of Phase F in the Merdeka Curriculum. Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap by identifying the CEFR levels of the reading passages in SPLASH 2 and examining their alignment with the expected CEFR B1 proficiency level.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative descriptive research design. A quantitative descriptive approach was considered appropriate when the primary goal was to systematically measure, describe, and summarize the characteristics of a phenomenon using numerical data without seeking to establish causal relationships or generalize findings to a broader population through inferential statistics (Creswell, 2014). This research design had been widely employed in EFL textbook analysis research in Indonesia and internationally (Hakim et al., 2021; Handayani et al., 2020; Kamil, 2023), providing a sound methodological precedent for the present study.

Data Source and Sampling

The data source for this study was the English language textbook entitled "Smart Path to Learning English" (SPLASH), Volume 2, for Grade XI SMK/MAK, Phase F, authored by Anik M. Indriastuti and published by Penerbit Erlangga (Indriastuti, 2022). This textbook was designed in accordance with the *Merdeka Curriculum* and was intended for students in the vocational clusters of health sciences and social work, agribusiness and agrotechnology, and maritime studies. It was one of the key textbooks published by Erlangga for the Grade XI SMK/MAK level in the current curriculum cycle.

The study employed total sampling. All six main reading passages in the SPLASH 2 English Textbook for Grade XI SMK/MAK were included as the research data. Each of the six chapters contains one main reading passage, resulting in a total of six reading passages analyzed in this study. Texts appearing in the exercises were excluded because they were not categorized as the main reading passages of the chapters. The use of total sampling is also consistent with previous textbook research. For example, Zastika, Ramadhan, and Rozimela (2026) employed total sampling to analyze all 211 evaluation instruments in an Indonesian Grade XI English textbook. This demonstrates that total sampling can be applied in textbook analysis when all units within the defined population are included in the analysis.

Instruments and Data Collection Procedures

The instrument used in this study was the Pearson GSE Text Analyzer, an online text analysis tool developed by Pearson. The tool analyzes the lexical and linguistic features of English texts and estimates their difficulty level using the Global Scale of English (GSE). The GSE scores are aligned with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), allowing the researcher to classify each reading passage into the corresponding CEFR level (A1–C2). The CEFR levels obtained from the analyzer were then interpreted using the reading descriptors in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment – Companion Volume (Council of Europe, 2020). In addition, the English Learning Outcomes *(Capaian Pembelajaran)* Phase F of the *Merdeka Curriculum* were used as the reference to examine the alignment between the reading passages and the curriculum.

Table 4. Official Pearson GSE – CEFR Alignment

GSE Score	CEFR Level
10 – 21	Below A1
22 – 29	A1
30 – 35	A2
36 – 42	A2+
43 – 50	B1
51 – 58	B1+
59 – 66	B2
67 – 75	B2+
76 – 84	C1
85 - 90	C2

(*Pearson. Official Global Scale of English – CEFR Alignment)*

Table 3.1 presents Pearson's official GSE–CEFR alignment used in this study. The GSE scores generated by the Pearson GSE Text Analyzer will be interpreted according to this alignment

to determine the corresponding CEFR level of each reading passage. The identified CEFR levels will subsequently be compared with the expected CEFR B1 proficiency level specified in the English Learning Outcomes *(Capaian Pembelajaran)* of Phase F in the *Merdeka Curriculum*.

The data collection procedure consisted of the following steps:

1. Selecting the Data Source

The researcher selected the Smart Path to Learning English (SPLASH 2) textbook for Grade XI SMK/MAK, published by Erlangga, as the source of the research data.

2. Selecting the Reading Passages

The researcher employed total sampling to include all six main reading passages from the textbook as the research data. One main reading passage from each chapter was included in the analysis. The selected passages served as the primary reading comprehension texts in their respective chapters, while dialogues, captions, sidebars, exercise instructions, and other supplementary materials were excluded.

3. Preparing the Research Data

The selected reading passages were extracted and prepared in plain text format to ensure compatibility with the Pearson GSE Text Analyzer. A total of six reading passages, one from each chapter, constituted the data for analysis.

Data Analysis Procedures

The data were analysed using descriptive quantitative analysis. The analysis was conducted through the following procedures:

1. Analysing the Reading Passages

Each of the six selected reading passages was analysed using the Pearson GSE Text Analyzer to obtain its Global Scale of English (GSE) score and corresponding CEFR level.

2. Identifying the CEFR Levels

The GSE scores generated by the Pearson GSE Text Analyzer were interpreted based on Pearson's official GSE–CEFR alignment to identify the CEFR proficiency level of each reading passage.

3. Examining the Alignment with the English Learning Outcomes

The identified CEFR levels were compared with the expected CEFR B1 proficiency level specified in the English Learning Outcomes *(Capaian Pembelajaran)* for Phase F of the *Merdeka Curriculum* to determine whether the reading passages were aligned with the curriculum.

4. Presenting and Interpreting the Findings

The findings were presented in the form of tables, frequencies, percentages, and descriptive explanations. The results were then interpreted to answer the two research questions regarding the CEFR levels of the reading passages and their alignment with the English Learning Outcomes of Phase F

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Finding

The first research question aimed to identify the CEFR levels of the six selected reading passages in the SPLASH 2 English Textbook using the Pearson GSE Text Analyzer. The second research question aimed to determine whether the identified CEFR levels were aligned with the

English Learning Outcomes *(Capaian Pembelajaran)* of Phase F. Therefore, the results of both research questions are presented together in Table 4.1.

Table 5. CEFR Levels and Alignment of the Selected Reading Passages in the SPLASH 2 English Textbook

Ch	Reading Passage	GSE Score	GSE Result	CEFR Level	Target CEFR (Phase F)	Alignment
1	Rawa Pening	62-66	B2	B2	B1	Not Aligned
2	Scabies	60-64	B2	B2	B1	Not Aligned
3	Benefits of Drinking Water for Health	66-70	B2+	B2	B1	Not Aligned
4	Natural Ways to Get Rid of Acne	69-73	B2+	B2	B1	Not Aligned
5	Benefits of Recycling Paper	62-66	B2	B2	B1	Not Aligned
6	Drinking Coffee	59-63	B2	B2	B1	Not Aligned

As presented in Table 4.1, the six selected reading passages were classified at the B2 and B2+ levels based on the Pearson GSE Text Analyzer. Four reading passages (66.7%) were classified at the B2 level, while two reading passages (33.3%) were classified at the B2+ level. The GSE scores varied across the six reading passages, but all of the obtained scores corresponded to the B2 or B2+ levels. According to Pearson's official GSE–CEFR Alignment, the B2+ sublevel falls within the B2 CEFR band. Therefore, the six reading passages were interpreted as being within the B2 CEFR band in this study. None of the selected reading passages was classified at the B1 level.

The finding that the reading passages were predominantly classified within the B2 CEFR band is supported by previous studies that have employed automated CEFR analyzers to determine the proficiency levels of English texts. Cueva et al. (2022), for example, used the Pearson GSE Text Analyzer to determine the CEFR level of an English reading text and found that the text corresponded to the B2 level. Similarly, Siripol et al. (2025) examined the consistency of several automated CEFR analyzers, including the Pearson GSE Text Analyzer, in classifying English texts. Their study showed that automated CEFR analyzers can provide CEFR classifications for English texts, although differences in classification results may occur across analyzers. These previous findings support the use of the Pearson GSE Text Analyzer in the present study as a tool for identifying the CEFR levels of the selected reading passages. In the present study, the GSE results were interpreted using Pearson's official GSE–CEFR Alignment to establish the corresponding CEFR levels.

Based on the analysis using the Pearson GSE Text Analyzer, Reading Passage 1, entitled The Legend of Rawa Pening, obtained a GSE score of (62–66), corresponding to the B2 CEFR level according to Pearson's official GSE–CEFR Alignment. The passage is a narrative text describing the origin of Rawa Pening through a sequence of events involving several characters. It contains varied vocabulary related to traditional culture and folklore, relatively complex sentence structures, and an extended narrative sequence. These linguistic characteristics indicate that the passage corresponds to the B2 proficiency level. Since the target CEFR level for Phase F is B1, this reading passage was categorized as not aligned.

Reading Passage 2, entitled Scabies, obtained a GSE score of (60–64) and was classified at the B2 CEFR level. The passage is an informational text explaining the causes, symptoms, diagnosis, treatment, and prevention of scabies. It contains specialized medical vocabulary and detailed factual explanations supported by cause-and-effect relationships. These linguistic features indicate that the passage corresponds to the B2 proficiency level. Therefore, this reading passage was categorized as not aligned with the target CEFR level (B1) for Phase F.

Reading Passage 3 obtained a GSE score of (66–70) and was classified as B2+ by the Pearson GSE Text Analyzer. According to Pearson's official GSE–CEFR Alignment, B2+ falls within the B2 CEFR band; therefore, the passage was interpreted as B2 in this study. The text contains health-related vocabulary, detailed explanations, and relatively complex sentence structures requiring readers to identify main ideas and supporting details. Consequently, this reading passage was categorized as not aligned with the target CEFR level (B1).

Reading Passage 4 obtained a GSE score of (69–73) and was classified as B2+. Based on Pearson's official GSE–CEFR Alignment, this level was interpreted as B2. The passage presents procedural and informational content using scientific and health-related vocabulary, sequential organization, and detailed explanations. These linguistic characteristics indicate that the passage exceeds the expected B1 level. Therefore, this reading passage was categorized as not aligned.

Reading Passage 5 obtained a GSE score of (62–66) and was classified at the B2 CEFR level. The passage discusses environmental issues using technical vocabulary, explanatory details, and relatively complex sentence structures. The overall linguistic complexity corresponds to the B2 level according to the Pearson GSE Text Analyzer. Since the identified level is above the target CEFR level (B1), this reading passage was categorized as not aligned.

Reading Passage 6 obtained a GSE score of (59–63) and was classified at the B2 CEFR level. The passage discusses the health effects of drinking coffee by presenting different viewpoints supported by scientific evidence. It contains advanced vocabulary, reported speech, and relatively complex sentence structures. These linguistic characteristics correspond to the B2 proficiency level. Therefore, this reading passage was categorized as not aligned with the target CEFR level (B1).

In terms of alignment with the English Learning Outcomes of Phase F, Table 4.1 shows that none of the six selected reading passages met the target CEFR level of B1. Since all six passages were identified at B2 or B2+, and B2+ was interpreted within the B2 CEFR band, all six reading passages were categorized as not aligned with the target CEFR level of Phase F. Thus, the alignment analysis showed that 0% of the reading passages were aligned, while 100% were categorized as not aligned.

Discussion

The findings of this study revealed that all six selected reading passages in the Smart Path to Learning English (SPLASH 2) textbook were classified at the B2 or B2+ level based on the Pearson GSE Text Analyzer. Four reading passages (66.7%) were classified at the B2 level, while two reading passages (33.3%) were classified at the B2+ level. According to Pearson's official GSE–CEFR Alignment, the B2+ sublevel falls within the B2 CEFR band. Therefore, both B2 and B2+ results were interpreted as B2 at the CEFR level.

The classification of the reading passages at the B2 level can be explained by their linguistic characteristics. In general, B2-level texts contain a broader range of vocabulary, more complex grammatical structures, longer and more varied sentence patterns, and a higher level of overall

linguistic complexity than B1-level texts. For example, the selected reading passages contained vocabulary related to specific topics and concepts, including terms such as dehydration, metabolism, digestive function, cardiovascular disease, blood pressure, and kidney stones. Such vocabulary is more specialized and conceptually demanding than the everyday and familiar vocabulary generally associated with B1-level reading materials. In addition, the passages contained complex sentences and relationships between ideas that required readers to process more detailed information.

In contrast, the expected B1 level for Phase F indicates that students should generally be able to understand texts written in clear standard language and comprehend the main points of familiar or relevant topics. B1-level reading materials are expected to use relatively familiar vocabulary and grammatical structures, although some less familiar words and more complex structures may still occur. Therefore, a B1-oriented textbook passage would be expected to present information using more accessible vocabulary, clearer sentence structures, and less linguistic complexity. The presence of more specialized vocabulary, longer and more complex sentences, and denser information in the selected passages may therefore explain why the Pearson GSE Text Analyzer classified them at B2 or B2+ rather than B1.

This difference is also relevant to the alignment between the textbook and the English Learning Outcomes *(Capaian Pembelajaran)* of Phase F. The target proficiency level specified in the English Learning Outcomes is B1. However, all six selected reading passages were classified at B2 or B2+, which indicates that the linguistic level of the passages was above the expected B1 level. Consequently, none of the selected reading passages met the target proficiency level, and all six passages (100%) were categorized as not aligned with the expected B1 level based on the alignment criteria established in this study.

These findings can be interpreted using Cunningsworth's (1995) theory of textbook evaluation, which states that teaching materials should be appropriate for learners' language proficiency, learning needs, and curriculum objectives. One important criterion proposed by Cunningsworth is the suitability of the language level of textbook materials for the intended learners. In the present study, however, all selected reading passages were classified above the target CEFR level of B1. This suggests that the linguistic complexity of the passages may exceed the expected proficiency level for Phase F students. Therefore, the selected reading passages do not fully meet Cunningsworth's criteria concerning the suitability of language level.

The findings are also consistent with the Pearson GSE–CEFR Alignment framework and the CEFR Companion Volume (Council of Europe, 2020). The B2 classification indicates that the passages require learners to deal with more complex languages and a wider range of vocabulary than would generally be expected at B1. At B2, readers are expected to understand the main ideas of complex texts on both concrete and abstract topics and to follow more detailed arguments. In comparison, B1 readers are generally expected to understand the main points of clear texts concerning familiar matters and topics of personal or general relevance. Thus, the classification of the passages at B2 and B2+ suggests that the texts demand a higher level of linguistic processing than the target B1 proficiency level.

The results of the present study are also comparable with previous studies on CEFR levels in Indonesian English textbooks. Kamil (2023), for example, found that only two of sixteen reading passages in a Grade X English textbook met the expected B1 level, while the other passages ranged from B2 to C2. Similarly, Yani et al. (2025) reported that most reading passages

in the English for Change textbook for Grade XI exceeded the expected B1 proficiency level, with the majority classified at B2 or above. The present study produced a similar pattern, although the result was more consistent across the selected passages because all six passages were classified at B2 or B2+. These similarities suggest that the use of reading materials above the expected B1 level may occur in more than one English textbook used in Indonesian secondary education.

The similarity between the present findings and previous studies can also be observed in the linguistic characteristics of the texts. The higher CEFR classifications in these studies indicate that the reading passages may contain vocabulary and sentence structures that require greater language proficiency than expected at B1. In the present study, the occurrence of topic-specific and relatively specialized vocabulary, together with complex sentence structures and dense information, contributed to the higher linguistic level identified by the Pearson GSE Text Analyzer. Therefore, the findings strengthen previous evidence that some English textbooks used in Indonesian secondary education contain reading materials whose linguistic complexity is above the expected curriculum level.

Overall, the findings indicate that the selected reading passages in SPLASH 2 were classified at B2 or B2+ because of their relatively broad and specialized vocabulary, more complex sentence structures, and greater overall textual complexity. These characteristics distinguish them from the clearer, more familiar, and comparatively less complex language expected at B1. Although B2-level materials may provide opportunities for students to encounter more challenging language and develop higher-level reading abilities, their consistent classification above the target B1 level indicates a mismatch with the English Learning Outcomes of Phase F. Therefore, based on the alignment criteria established in this study, all six selected reading passages are categorized as not aligned with the expected B1 proficiency level.

CONCLUSION

The analysis of the six selected reading passages in the Smart Path to Learning English (SPLASH 2) textbook showed that all passages were classified at the B2 or B2+ level by the Pearson GSE Text Analyzer. Four passages (66.7%) were classified as B2, while two passages (33.3%) were classified as B2+. According to Pearson's official GSE–CEFR Alignment, the B2+ sublevel falls within the B2 CEFR band. Therefore, both B2 and B2+ results were interpreted as B2 at the CEFR level. The classification was also consistent with the linguistic characteristics observed in the passages, including relatively sophisticated vocabulary, more complex sentence structures, and greater overall text complexity.

In terms of alignment with the English Learning Outcomes *(Capaian Pembelajaran)* of Phase F in the Merdeka Curriculum, the target CEFR level was B1. Since all six selected reading passages were classified at B2 or B2+, none of them met the expected B1 level. Consequently, all six reading passages (100%) were categorized as not aligned with the target CEFR level. Although the SPLASH 2 textbook is stated by the publisher to be intended for B1 learners, the findings showed that the linguistic level of the selected reading passages was above the expected B1 level. Therefore, the selected reading passages were not aligned with the target CEFR level specified in the English Learning Outcomes of Phase F.

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