

## ARE THEY FINELY TUNED?: MAPPING THE CEFR LEVEL OF THE READING TEXTS OF THE ENGLISH TEXTBOOK FOR GRADE 10 OF INDONESIAN SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL

Dairabi Kamil

State Islamic Institute of Kerinci, Indonesia

Email: drbkml@gmail.com

**Abstract:** This study sought to investigate the CEFR level of the reading passages of the English textbook for Grade 10 of Indonesian senior high school written within the framework of the newly launched *Kurikulum Merdeka* and the extent to which the levels match the intention of the curriculum. Drawing on a quantitative approach, the data for the study were 16 reading passages of the textbook and analyzed using an online program for analyzing the CEFR level of texts. The results showed that only 2 out of the 16 passages were of B1 CEFR level, the level the textbook is intended to be by the curriculum. The rest range from B2 to C2 CEFR level indicating that, in general, the passages are higher in their CEFR levels than that stipulated by the curriculum.

**Keywords:** CEFR, English textbook, grade 10, Indonesian senior high school, reading texts.

### 1. Introduction

Textbooks have always played a vital role as a source of learning in the context of English as a foreign language (EFL) teaching and learning. This is partly due to the fact that in an EFL environment students receive a limited exposure to English outside their English classes at schools or courses. Studies on the use of EFL textbooks by Srakang (2013) in Thailand, Hammad (2014) in Palestine, Aghazadeh (2015) in Iran, and Orfan, Noori & Akramy, (2021) in Afghanistan, for example, all

suggest the important role of the textbooks in their teaching. Similarly, the same view is also shared by EFL student across different EFL contexts (see for example, Khodabandeh & Mombini, 2018; Wen-Cheng, Chien-Hung, & Chung-Chieh, 2011; Rahimi, & Hassani, 2012).

Having a vital role, EFL textbooks should be well suited to the level of English proficiency of the students they intended for as well as properly aligned to curriculum in order for successful learning of the language to take place. However, studies on various aspects of EFL textbooks in different contexts showed that such qualities are not always met by the textbooks. Study by Hu, Gao, and Qiu (2021)

on EFL textbooks for secondary school in Hong Kong, for example, found that lexical coverage of the textbooks were inappropriate for the level of the student's English proficiency. Furthermore, research by Adli and Mahmoudi (2017) showed the reading comprehension questions in EFL textbooks used in Iran were not well ordered in terms of hierarchical levels of difficulty. Also, study by Hakim, Setyaningsih, and Cahyaningrum (2021) indicated that the readability of reading texts of an Indonesian textbook for senior high school was below the student's English proficiency level.

In the Indonesian education system, where English is a compulsory school subject, curriculum changes always entail publication of new English textbooks. Currently, although the 2013 Curriculum is still implemented, in February 2022 the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology launched a new curriculum called *Kurikulum Merdeka* which stressed on student-centered learning. The implementation of the new curriculum is optional in nature. Schools may adopt it, use it together with the 2013 Curriculum, or continue using the 2013 Curriculum only. Interestingly, different from previous curricula that used elementary, intermediate, and advanced categorization of learners' mastery of English, the objectives of English teaching and learning of *Kurikulum Merdeka* (Kemedikbudristek, 2021) refer to The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) in targeting the level of English proficiency to be achieved in English teaching and learning across different levels of schooling. As part and parcel of the new curriculum, the ministry also launched English textbooks for elementary and secondary schools. To date, as far as

the relevant literature is concerned, no research has been conducted on the extent to which the contents of the textbooks comply with the CEFR levels they are intended for.

Considering first, the important role of textbooks in English teaching and learning in an EFL context; second, the expected link and match between the textbook and the learner's English proficiency and curriculum; third the newly launched *Kurikulum Merdeka* and its CEFR referred English textbooks; and fourth, the unavailability of research on the extent to which the contents of the textbooks-especially, the reading passages of the Grade Ten English textbook, comply with the CEFR levels they are intended for, the present study is timely to fill this gap.

Specifically, this study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the CEFR Levels of the reading passages of the Grade 10 English textbook?
2. To what extent do the levels of the reading passages of the Grade 10 English textbook comply with the CEFR level of the textbook they are intended for?

## 2. Literature Review

This section presents the reviews of concepts and research referred to by the present study. It covers the objectives of English teaching and learning in *Kurikulum Merdeka* and CEFR for languages.

### ***The objectives of English teaching and learning in Kurikulum Merdeka***

The *Kurikulum Merdeka* divides the objectives and contents of elementary and secondary schooling

into 6 interconnected phases. Elementary education is partitioned into three phases, i.e. Phase A that includes grade 1 and grade 2; Phase B that includes grade 3 and 4; Phase C that includes grade 5 and 6; Phase D that includes grade 7, 8, and 9; Phase E that includes grade 10; and Phase F that includes Grade 11 and 12 (Kemendikbudristek 2022). In general, English teaching and learning in Phase A is aimed at introducing the students to English and developing basic speaking skills. Phase B focuses on further improvements of speaking skills and introduction to English writing which are continued in Phase C. These are to be further strengthened in Phase D. Finally, English learning in Phase E and Phase F seeks to achieve CEFR B1 Level (Kemendikbudristek 2022) which is explained in details in the subsection to follow.

The curriculum specifies the objectives of English teaching and learning in the form of descriptions of the language skills, i.e. Listening and speaking, reading, and writing and presenting, the student is expected to be able to perform by the end of each of the phases. Specifically, pertaining to the objectives of English reading teaching and learning in Phase E (grade 10) which is the focus of the present study, the curriculum documents states:

By the end of Phase E, students read and respond to a variety of texts, such as narratives, descriptions, procedures, expositions, recount and report. They read to learn or to find information. They locate and evaluate specific details and main ideas of a variety of texts. These texts may be in the form of print or digital texts, including visual, multimodal or interactive texts. They are developing understanding of main ideas, issues or plot development in a variety of

texts. They identify the author's purposes and are developing simple inferential skills to help them understand implied information from the texts. (Kemendikbudristek, 2022, p.161).

### **The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)**

CEFR is a standardized framework for testing and characterizing language ability. It is widely used throughout Europe and many other regions of the world to assess and evaluate language talents in various languages. The CEFR is organized into six levels of competency, ranging from A1 (beginning) through C2 (mastery). Each level is defined by a collection of particular language abilities and communication competencies, such as the capacity to interpret spoken and written language, speak and write, and engage in a variety of circumstances (Council of Europe 2020).

Historically, the CEFR was developed in the late 1970s by the Council of Europe, an intergovernmental organization that promotes cooperation among countries in Europe. However it was first published in 2001. The need for a standard framework for language learning and evaluation that could be utilized across Europe was one of the key factors driving the development of the CEFR. Before the introduction of the CEFR, different European nations utilized different techniques for measuring language competency, making it difficult for students to compare their levels of proficiency and for institutions to accept each other's qualifications (Council of Europe 2020).

The CEFR describes six levels of language proficiency, ranging from A1 (beginner) to C2

(advanced). The levels are defined by a set of descriptors that outline the linguistic and communicative competences that are expected at each level. A brief overview of the six levels of proficiency in the CEFR is summarized in Table 1.

**Table 1. CEFR Global Scale**

Proficient	C2	Can understand with ease virtually everything heard or read. Can summarise information from different spoken and written sources, reconstructing arguments and accounts in a coherent presentation. Can express him/herself spontaneously, very fluently and precisely, differentiating finer shades of meaning even in more complex situations.
User	C1	Can understand a wide range of demanding, longer texts, and recognise implicit meaning. Can express him/herself fluently and spontaneously without much obvious searching for expressions. Can use language flexibly and effectively for social, academic and professional purposes. Can produce clear, well-structured, detailed text on complex subjects, showing controlled use of organisational patterns, connectors and cohesive devices.
Independent	B2	Can understand the main ideas of complex text on both concrete and abstract topics, including technical discussions in his/her field of specialisation. Can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible without strain for either party. Can produce clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects and explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options.
User	B1	Can understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. Can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling in an area where the language is spoken. Can produce simple connected text on topics which are familiar or of personal interest. Can describe experiences and events, dreams, hopes & ambitions and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans.
Basic	A2	Can understand sentences and frequently used expressions related to areas of most immediate relevance (e.g. very basic personal and family information, shopping, local geography, employment). Can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar and routine matters. Can describe in simple terms aspects of his/her background, immediate environment and matters in areas of immediate need.
User	A1	Can understand and use familiar everyday expressions and very basic phrases aimed at the satisfaction of needs of a concrete type. Can introduce him/herself and others and can ask and answer questions about personal details such as where he/she lives, people he/she knows and things he/she has. Can interact in a simple way provided the other person talks slowly and clearly and is prepared to help.

Source: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/common-european-framework-reference-languages/table-1-cefr-3.3-common-reference-levels-global-scale>

As for reading comprehension, the CEFR general descriptor for B1 Level- the focus of the present study, outlines that language learners “Can read straightforward factual texts on subjects related to their field of interest with a satisfactory level of comprehension” (Council of Europe, 2020; p.54). Reading comprehension is further distinguished into 5 types based on the purpose of reading and the genre of the texts, namely reading correspondence, reading for orientation, reading for information and argument, reading instructions, and reading as leisure activities. All of these types of reading came with their own specific descriptors.

### 3. Method

This section presents the design, source of data, technique of data collection and analysis of the study. For clarity purposes, specific examples are also given on the technique of data analysis.

#### *Design*

The present study seeks to examine the level of the reading texts of the English textbook for grade ten of Indonesian high school and the extent to which they are suited to the intended B1 Level of Proficiency of CEFR as stipulated by the Ministry of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia. As the data for the study are in the form numerical in nature involving the number of words, average sentence length, average word length and measure of word complexity, the present study take an quantitative design.

#### *Sources of data*

The data used in the present study were derived from an English textbook for grade ten of senior high school published by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology of the Republic of Indonesia in 2022. The textbook, entitled “Bahasa Inggris: Work in Progress” is based on the latest curriculum of Indonesia’s education system called “Merdeka Belajar” curriculum which was launched in February 2022. The textbook was written by the same team of authors and consists of six chapters. These chapters are divided into two themes and to be covered in two semesters. The first three chapters that are on sports are to be covered in semester one. The other three chapters are on arts and designed for semester two. All the chapters are divided into sections on speaking, listening, reading and viewing, writing and presenting, project, vocabulary, and grammar and structure.

Targetwise, the textbook is intended to assist students and teachers in achieving B1 Level of proficiency of the CEFR (Kemendikbudristek, 2022) where students are expected to be able to:

understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. Can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst traveling in an area where the language is spoken. Can produce simple connected text on topics which are familiar or of personal interest. Can describe experiences and events, dreams, hopes & ambitions and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans. (<https://www.coe.int/en/web/common-european-framework-reference-languages/table-1-cefr-3.3-common-reference-levels-global-scale>)

### Data Collection and Analysis

The data for the present study were exclusively collected from the reading parts of the textbook. The process began with identification of texts that were purposely aimed for reading comprehension activities. The identified texts were then analyzed for their CEFR levels using a web-based text analyzer program that is available at <http://www.roadtogrammar.com/textanalysis/> by copying and pasting them on the program. The program compares the submitted text to a list of the 10000 most commonly used words in English, calculates the average word and sentence length, and applies an algorithm to rate the difficulty of the text. The program then provides outputs on the CEFR and Skills levels of the texts, the corresponding IELTS Band estimates, as well as suggested vocabulary, statistics on the number of words, average sentence length, average word length and measure of word complexity of the texts. For example, inputting the

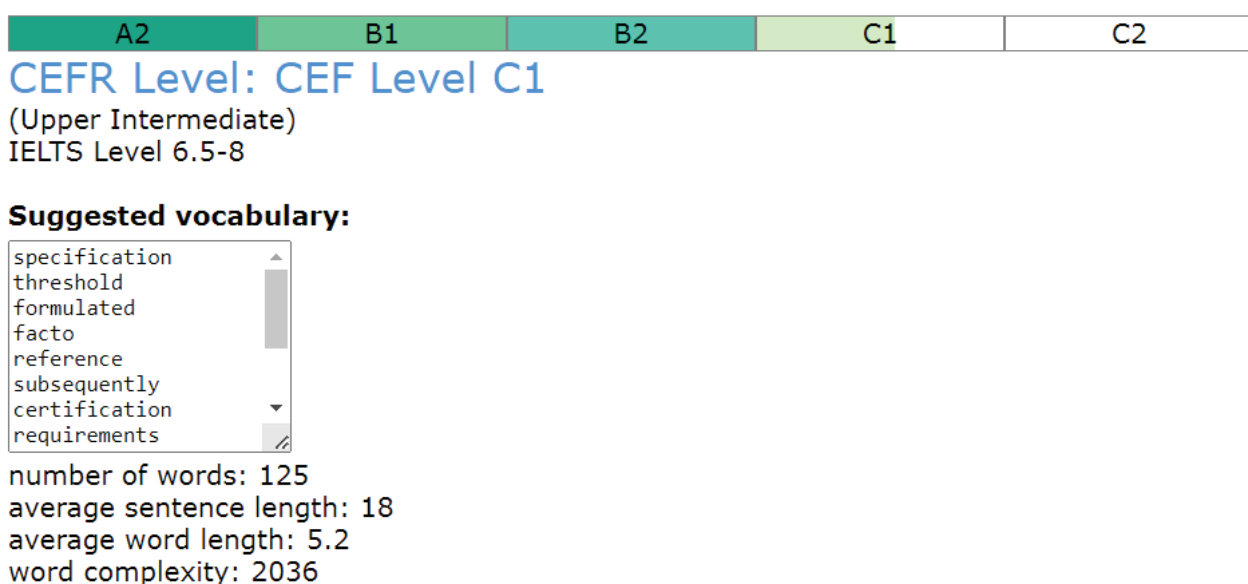
following text into the program will produce the output shown in Picture 1:

The first specification of this “threshold level” was formulated for the English language (Threshold level, 1975), quickly followed by French (Un Niveau Seuil, 1976). These two instruments have been used de facto as models for the same type of reference instruments that were produced subsequently for other languages, but they were adapted to suit the peculiar features of each language.

In order to meet the teaching and certification requirements, the level concept as defined was extended to cover specification of levels lying immediately below and above the threshold level. In the light of the developments in this field, particularly as regards the CEFR, other levels were developed for a number of languages. These proficiency levels constitute one of the origins of the six-level scale of the CEFR.

*(Source: [coe.int/en/web/common-european-framework-reference-languages/level-descriptions](http://coe.int/en/web/common-european-framework-reference-languages/level-descriptions))*

Picture 1. Online CEFR text analyzer output



#### 4. Findings

Examination of the textbook identified 16 passages (see Table 1.) that were intended for reading comprehension activities. They came in the form of biography articles, narrative, expository, and argumentative texts. Most of the passages are authentic in nature as they were adopted from websites that were not intended for English learning. The length of the passages ranged from 56 (Text 4)

to 792 words (Text 15) with average word length of between 4,1 (Text 14) to 5,8 characters (Text 7). The longest passage is text 15, a narrative passage entitled *Little Red Riding 2* which has 792 words. While the shortest one is passage is text 4, an expository passage on *The Paralympic Games* that has 56 words. Pertaining to the measure of word complexity, the passages range from 1223 (Text 9) to 4179 (Text 4).

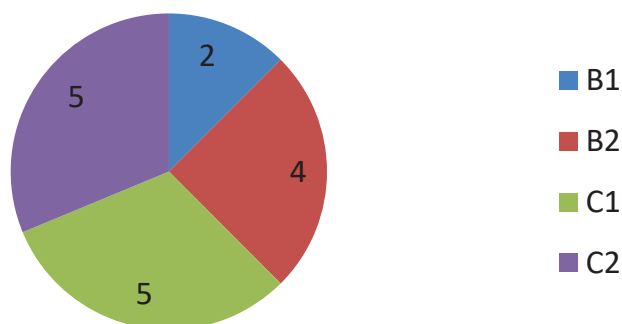
**Table 2. Summary of the statistics and CEFR level of the passages**

Text No.	Title/Topic	Text Type	NoW	ASL	AWL	WC	CEFR Level
1	Cristiano Ronaldo	Descriptive	218	6	4,7	1944	C1
2	The Paralympic Heroes	Descriptive	85	9	4,9	1918	C1
3	Watching Football Match	Recount	351	17	4,6	1406	B2
4	The Paralympic Games	Recount	56	7	5,3	4179	C2
5	My Daily Journal	Expository	119	7	5,2	1948	C1
6	Simple Tips for Healthy Eating	Procedure	511	7	4,4	1770	B2
7	My Healthy Meal	Expository	85	5	5,8	3924	C2
8	Do you know?	Expository	84	6	4,9	2025	C1
9	Why Should Graffiti be Considered Art?	Expository	376	8	4,5	1223	B1
10	Graffiti is Always Vandalism	Expository	285	18	5	2415	C2
11	Social Media Post against Graffiti	Expository	131	16	4,9	2055	C1
12	Social Media Post supporting against graffiti	Expository	153	7	4,8	1501	B2
13	Gritty Graffiti in Indonesia	Expository	79	20	5,1	2286	C2
14	Little Red Riding Hood 1	Narrative	281	7	4,2	1282	B1
15	Little Red Riding Hood 2	Narrative	792	8	4,1	1730	B2
16	From Story to Movie	Expository	116	13	4,9	3074	C2

NoW: Number of Word; ASL: Average Sentence Length; AWL: Average Word Length;  
WC: Word Complexity.

In terms of the CEFR levels, the passages range from as low as B1 to the highest level of C2. Specifically, only 2 passages out of 16, i.e. Text 9 and Text 14, are on B1 level of difficulty, the level that the textbook is intended for. The rest of the passages are of B2 (4 passages), C1 (5 passages), and even C2 (5 passages) levels. The distribution of the level of difficulty of the 16 passages is summarized in the following chart:

**Chart 1. Distribution of the CEFR Levels of the passages**



In summary, the findings show that most of the passages (14 text) are above the CEFR level of B1, the level that the textbook is intended for. Therefore, it is safe to infer that the reading passages of the textbooks were not finely tuned to its intended CEFR level.

## 5. Discussion

The findings of the study that show the reading passages were not properly aligned with the level of English proficiency they were supposed to be was not an uncommon phenomenon. Studies by Fata, Komariah, and Alya (2022), Hakim, Setyaningsih, and Cahyaningrum (2021), Handayani, Furaidah, and Ivone (2021), and Hanifa, Wahyuni, and Haryati, S. (2022), for example, although focusing

on the readability of the passages of Indonesian senior high school textbooks developed within the framework of the 2013 curriculum, also identified similar phenomena. Mostly, these studies found that a great number of the passages examined were below the students' English proficiency level which is in contrast to the findings of the present study. Nevertheless, the contradiction may also reflect a higher standard of difficulty imposed on the reading passages in the *Kurikulum Merdeka*-based English textbook. However, as far as the issue is concerned, no explanation on why such misalignments occurred is unavailable.

Although the impacts of roughly-tuned EFL learning materials, such as the passages examined in the present study, on the student's mastery of English may vary from one context to another and depend on the student's English proficiency, studies on the effect of graded readers on the students' reading comprehension (e.g. Kara, 2019; Chou, 2022; Hagley, 2017; Alghizzi & Elyas 2022) showed that those who were exposed to graded readers performed better than those who were not. To some extent, the finding of these research re-proved the importance of the concept *comprehensible input* (Krashen, 1982) in language teaching and learning which stresses that, in order for learning to take place successfully, language learners should be exposed to input (spoken or written language) that is at or slightly above their present level of language ability. In light of these, failure to properly match the input, such as reading materials, with the level of the student's proficiency may run the risk of unsuccessful learning.



## 6. Conclusions and Recommendations

The present study showed that the reading passages of the textbook for Grade 10 of Indonesian senior high school were not properly aligned with the CEFR level it was intended for. This study also showed that misalignment to the student's level of English proficiency had repeatedly been identified in previous studies on English textbooks that were written within the 2013 Curriculum framework. The discussion suggests that, theoretically and practically, such misalignments could be counterproductive to the student's English language learning as, in addition, textbooks play an important role in an EFL context. In light of these, the followings are suggested: first, careful examination should always be exercised by textbook authors to ensure that the textbook's materials are well suited with the objectives of the curriculum and the student's English proficiency; second, the teacher should also pay attention on the issue and take relevant actions if deemed necessary when encountering misalignment problems, for example by supplying more suitable materials for the students; third, as research on the issue in *Kurikulum Merdeka* English textbooks is novel in nature, further studies on English textbooks for other levels of schooling and grades are highly recommended.

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