

Exploring lower secondary Malaysian teachers' perceptions of using the listening materials in the 'Pulse 2' textbook

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Abstract: As Malaysia's education is going through major reforms, an impact from the recent global development worldwide, various efforts have been put forward to ensure the Malaysian education system is globally competitive. One of the crucial steps taken was to align its English language education system to the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR). In implementing the CEFR-aligned curriculum in the Malaysian classrooms, the Pulse 2 Textbook was introduced as the key resource. Although the initiative to bring in Pulse 2 textbook was a welcomed approach, just like any policy implementation, the textbook brought various challenges. This hindered both teachers' and students' capability to fully participate in the curriculum and accomplish the required language proficiency outcomes. The study reported in this paper is one part of a larger study on CEFR-aligned curriculum in the Malaysian classrooms. Since this study was one of very scarce studies that explored the practicality of the foreign, CEFR-aligned English textbook to teach listening skills, the focus was to explore teachers' perceptions. Specifically, the study investigated teachers' level of satisfaction, pedagogical approaches, and challenges in using Pulse 2 for teaching listening skills to lower secondary students. A phenomenological qualitative research design using open-ended interviews was applied to gain a detailed understanding of teachers' perceptions of using the listening materials in the Pulse 2 textbook. The sample consisted of five teachers currently employed as lower secondary English language teachers in a government school in Semenyih. Data was analyzed using Braun and Clarke's Six-phase Thematic Analytic Process. Coding was done using the In-Vivo coding method to develop themes for discussion. The study found that overall, teachers were satisfied with the materials in the textbook to be used in teaching listening skills. Although teachers still faced issues of cultural content and lexical suitability, activities from the textbook were easily modified and adapted for students of various proficiencies to achieve curriculum objectives. However, much still needs to be done in terms of improving school infrastructure, supplying quality equipment and providing professional development support to teachers to ensure that they can accurately and confidently carry out the listening activities outlined in the Pulse 2 Textbook. This study has crucial implications that suggest a need for a more inclusive and supportive approach to managing both the pedagogical requirements and professional development of teachers involved in teaching listening skills to lower secondary students using the Pulse 2, CEFR-aligned textbook.

Keywords: CEFR-aligned curriculum, Listening skills, Listening materials, Pulse 2 Textbook, Teachers' perceptions.

1. Introduction

The Malaysian Education Blueprint (MEB) introduced in 2013 highlighted the urgent need to prepare Malaysian students with the knowledge and skills to become global citizens of the 21st century. One of these skills is the ability to communicate effectively in English. This led to the launch of the English Language Education Reform in Malaysia: The Roadmap 2015-2025 by the Ministry of Education (MOE) and with it the adoption of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) into the Malaysian English Language syllabus. The roadmap brought about a landmark change in the teaching and learning of English Language, including curriculum, pedagogical approaches, and methods of assessments (Mohd Don & Abdullah, 2019).

One of the main features of the revitalized CEFR-aligned English Language curriculum was the equal distribution of importance given to all four language skills, namely listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Instead of focusing on scoring for exams through reading and writing, the CEFR-aligned curriculum provided students to track their progress using proficiency descriptors along a continuum from preschool to university. With the launch of English Language Education Reform in Malaysia (2015-2025), the restructuring of the national examination, Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM) which is equivalent to O-Levels also transpired. The shifting focus from traditional approaches to teaching and assessments of English Language to the CEFR-aligned curriculum saw great challenges within the education system. Teachers specifically, whose approaches used to be primarily focused on teaching reading and writing for national examinations now had to refresh their repertoire to include methods of teaching speaking and listening skills at an equal level.

To complete the CEFR curriculum implementation and support the teachers in this endeavor, the Ministry of Education Malaysia introduced imported textbooks for all levels. For the lower secondary, the Pulse 2 textbook was assigned in 2017 to Form 1 students, and in 2018 to Form 2 students. The introduction of this textbook led to a directive declaring the Pulse 2 as 'textbook material' and other locally produced English books as 'non-textbook material' (Johari & Aziz, 2019). The Pulse 2 textbook, which covers all four language skills through various topics and activities within nine chapters, was proclaimed the main teaching tool in the CEFR-aligned Form 1 and Form 2 classrooms commencing 2017 till date.

Since the inception of Pulse 2 textbook into the Malaysian classrooms in 2017, various perspectives arose, including concerns on the textbook's high lexical richness (Johari & Aziz, 2019; Goh & Aziz, 2020; Shak et al., 2021a), elevated prices (FMT Reporters, 2017; The Star Online, 2018), and a scarcity of congruence between local and international materials (Arumugam et al., 2022; Shak et al., 2021b; Shak et al., 2023).

While many studies have focused on the criticisms of the CEFR-aligned textbooks' cultural content in general (Arumugam et al., 2022; Aziz, 2017; Aripin & Yusoff, 2022; Mohammed, et al., 2021; Rahim & Daghih, 2019; Shak et al., 2021a; Shak et al., 2021b), there is still a lack of studies exploring the teaching and learning of specific language skill, particularly the teaching of listening skills. Studies that had previously focused on the language learning materials in the textbook tend to weigh more on speaking and reading skills (Goh & Azlina, 2020). One reason for this could be due to the extensive literature stating that listening is a difficult skill to teach, master or assess (Ho, 2016; Hussein, 2020; Renandya et al., 2023; Thao & Tham, 2020). This suggests that listening is still an under-explored skill in the Malaysian teachers' repertoire which matches the findings of previous studies that the teaching and learning of listening skills is often overlooked, as it is taught in passing over other skills (Lim, 2013; Sadiku, 2015; Thao & Tham, 2020).

Nevertheless, with CEFR being aligned into the Malaysian curriculum, listening has become one out of four language components that denote attainment of second language proficiency at national examinations. Since the CEFR-aligned curriculum currently used in schools do place the same importance on listening skills as it does on reading, writing and speaking, more substantial research is therefore required to ensure that the teaching of listening skills is effective and impactful to be able to contribute positively to students' academic achievement.

1.1. Research Aim

With 6 years from its first implementation in year 2017, studies of Pulse 2 textbook have been focused on the content in general stating aspects of cultural differences as well as teachers' perception of the textbook in general (Arumugam et al. 2022; Johari & Abdul Aziz, 2019; Shak, 2021a, 2021b). In terms of language skills, only one specific study by Goh and Aziz (2020) found teachers exhibiting optimistic perceptions towards using the speaking materials in 'PULSE 2' as they found the materials to provide sufficient input to help teachers in delivering their lessons and conducting appropriate assessments.

Since studies on Pulse 2 textbook is still at the very initial stages, no substantial studies have been found that have explored the listening component of the KSSM Pulse 2 Textbook, specifically one that is related to lower secondary school level, although its other CEFR-aligned KSSR textbooks for primary school have been scrutinized in some studies (Mohan, 2021; Nair, 2021; Aripin & Yusoff, 2022; Chong & Yamat, 2021).

Based on the above background and gaps, this study was therefore designed in hopes to gain insights from teachers' on using the Pulse 2 English textbook, particularly in its implementation and usability for teaching listening.

Specifically, this study was developed to address three key research questions:

1. *What are the lower secondary school teachers' level of satisfaction in using the materials from the CEFR-aligned Pulse 2 textbook for teaching listening?*
2. *What are the approaches used by lower secondary school teachers when implementing listening activities presented in the CEFR-aligned Pulse 2 textbook?*
3. *What are the major issues and challenges teachers face in teaching listening skills using the CEFR-aligned Pulse 2 textbook?*

1.2. Significance of Study

This study is one of very limited studies which have explored the practicality of the foreign, CEFR-aligned English textbook 'Pulse 2' in aiding the lower-secondary Malaysian teachers to teach their students, particularly, the listening skills. The significance of this study lies in its founding assessment of the feasibility and efficiency of the CEFR-aligned English textbook 'Pulse 2' for teaching listening skills in lower-secondary classrooms in Malaysia. Given the scarcity of research focused on this specific context, this study fills a crucial gap by gaging how a foreign, CEFR-aligned resource aligns with local teaching needs and curriculum goals. By investigating how 'Pulse 2' supports Malaysian teachers in developing their students' listening skills, this study offers valuable insights into the adaptability and impact of 'foreign' educational materials in a diverse linguistic environment. Furthermore, the findings will contribute to a deeper understanding of the practical challenges and benefits associated with integrating globally recognized frameworks into national curricula. This research not only informs educators and policymakers about the effectiveness of 'Pulse 2' but also guides future decisions on textbook selection and instructional strategies, ultimately enhancing the quality of English language education for Malaysian students.

2. Literature Review

Research on second language acquisition emphasizes the importance of meaningful input to facilitate and encourage a learner towards mastering a second language. Although listening comprehension is acknowledged as a fundamental skill in the process of second language acquisition, studies have shown that it is considered as one of the most difficult language skills for learners to master (Thao & Tham, 2020) and one of the most challenging skills to teach for second/foreign language teachers (Ho, 2016; Hussein, 2020). To close these gaps, the Ministry of Education (MOE) in Malaysia brought about the CEFR-aligned curriculum for Malaysian students with the aim to improve not only their productive skills, but also receptive skills, which includes listening. As the main guide for teachers in providing

meaningful input for their learners at the Malaysian classroom, Pulse 2 textbook was seen as an imperative tool to teach all four skills of the English Language-reading, writing, speaking and listening.

2.1. Listening Comprehension

In broad terms, listening comprehension refers to the ability of a learner to understand a text that is read aloud (Hogan et al, 2014). Similarly, Kim & Pilcher (2016) define listening comprehension as a learner's ability to listen and comprehend spoken language. According to Richards (2016), listening as comprehension is the traditional way of considering listening, in that the main function of listening is to "facilitate understanding of spoken discourse". Therefore, listening comprehension in language learning can be seen as a learner's ability to understand spoken utterances in the target language.

There are two kinds of processes involved in understanding spoken discourse, and they are often referred to as bottom-up and top-down processing. In bottom-up processing, the listener focuses on individual words, phrases or cohesive devices and gains understanding by connecting these elements together to form a whole picture (Harmer, 2007). Meaning is contained in the language we hear, and comprehension is therefore viewed as a process of decoding sounds, and parts of a sentence to arrive at a meaning (Richards, 2016). In top-down processing the listener taps into their schemata or background knowledge to allow them to have suitable expectations of what they are about to listen to (Harmer, 2007; Richards, 2016). This background knowledge includes previous experiences, situational or contextual knowledge, all of which allows the listener to activate their expectations, make predictions and generate questions which they will use to process the information they hear (Richards, 2016).

However, these two types of processing often work together in that the learner pieces together parts of language and relevant background knowledge to conclude the meaning of the text they are listening to. The *mental model* built with this combination of information brings both processes into a cohesive whole (Hogan, et al, 2014). It is the understanding of a reasonable proportion of each element which allows the learner to fully comprehend the spoken discourse. The ability of the learner to transfer these skills to real-life authentic situations is the mark of the learner achieving acquisition of listening skills in the target language (Renandya et al., 2023).

2.2. Second Language Acquisition Theory and Input-Affect Hypotheses for Teaching Listening

Second language acquisition research addresses how a learner learns a second language after mastering a first language. The influential work of linguist Stephen Krashen in developing the Second Language Acquisition (SLA) Theory in the 1980s is still acknowledged as a major reference in this field. In his theory, he posits five components: The Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis, The Monitor Hypothesis, The Natural Order Hypothesis, The Input Hypothesis and the Affective Filter Hypothesis. Each of these components refers to a different aspect of learning a new language. While the theory has since faced criticism from several researchers (Lee, 2013), the SLA theory still carries a huge impact in second language (L2) literature.

In understanding the teaching of listening skills, the Input Hypothesis and Affective Filter Hypothesis are significant than the other three hypotheses. This is due to the fact that listening is a receptive skill, in which a learner gains input in the form of processible language. The term 'comprehensible input' coined by Krashen under his Input Hypothesis refers to the language input that a second language learner can understand, despite not understanding all the words and structures in the given input (British Council, 2023).

Second, listening requires students to be engaged and motivated in order to complete a task in a way that would help them develop language skills, which refers to the Affective Filter Hypothesis. This includes introducing listening material that not only fulfils curriculum aims, but also caters to students' interests and learning styles. In addition, cultural differences, language levels and opportunities for practice should also be considered when designing or modifying listening materials.

In other words, integrating input and affect involves choosing listening materials that are not only appropriate for the learner's level but also presented in a way that minimizes anxiety and promotes positive emotional responses.

2.3. *Pulse 2 Textbook in the Malaysian Classroom*

The textbook acts as a starting point for teachers to begin their task to teach language skills, as it is a guide provided as part of the CEFR-aligned curriculum. The introduction of the Pulse 2 Textbook, along with other imported textbooks, although a welcome initiative was initially met with many concerns. These included issues regarding its complex and rather advanced lexical use, high price (FMT Reporters, 2017; The Star Online, 2018), imbalanced and biased cultural content (Wan Nazari & Aziz, 2020), lack of local content that the students would be able to relate to (Aziz, 2017; Aripin & Yusoff, 2022; Mohammed, et al., 2021), as well as its suitability with Malaysia's English language curriculum (Johar & Aziz, 2019; Shak et.al.,2021a; Chong & Yamat, 2021).

In addition, certain studies have also shown that there has been concern and anxiety among teachers towards the implementation of CEFR in their classroom (Lo, 2018). More precisely, teachers faced various challenges in preparing appropriate teaching and learning materials (Mohammed, et al. 2021) due to the self-professed lack of knowledge of CEFR itself. These uncertainties, although should not persist as the 2017 CEFR-aligned English curriculum has now entered its sixth year, still draws great concern among school teachers.

2.4. *Listening Activities in the Pulse 2 Textbook*

Based on the content in the Pulse 2 textbook, there are at least 2 listening activities for each unit. They are listed under 'Listening and Pronunciation' and 'Integrated Skills', where the activities are combined with other language skills. However, a closer examination reveals that there are more listening activities the teacher can work within each unit. This is because audio material is also provided for other components. The following is an analysis of the audio files provided according to each skills component and their corresponding activities.

Table 1.
An analysis of activities based on audio files in the pulse 2 textbook.

Skills component	Audio files	Activity
Vocabulary and speaking	1.08, 1.21, 1.36, 1.49, 2.12, 2.24, 2.40, 3.07, 3.20	Listen and repeat vocabulary
	1.22, 2.41, 3.08	Listen and complete the blanks
Reading	1.09, 1.15, 1.23, 1.29, 2.05, 2.26, 2.32, 2.38, 3.02, 3.09, 3.15, 3.21, 3.30, 1.50	Read and listen (listen and follow the text), then answer the questions / Complete the blanks
	1.37, 1.43, 2.13, 2.19, 2.42, 3.26	Make a prediction based on the picture/text, then read and listen to check the answer
Grammar	1.10, 1.11, 1.17, 1.24, 1.25, 1.31, 1.32, 1.38, 1.39, 1.51, 1.52, 2.14, 2.15, 2.27, 2.28, 2.44, 2.45, 3.10, 3.11, 3.22, 3.23	Pronunciation practice
	1.16, 1.44, 2.06, 2.20, 2.33, 3.03, 3.16, 3.27	Complete the blanks with the correct grammar item, then listen to check answers
Vocabulary and listening	1.12, 1.26, 1.40, 2.02, 2.16, 2.29, 2.46, 3.12, 3.24	Listen and repeat the words
	1.13, 2.17, 2.22, 2.48, 3.25	Listen to complete the blanks in a(n) dialogue/diagram

	1.14, 2.18, 3.14	Listen and determine true or false statements
	1.27, 1.41, 1.42, 2.03, 2.30, 2.47, 3.13	Match the pictures/ Complete the blanks/Predict the answer then listen and check your answers
	1.28, 1.42, 2.04, 2.21, 2.13, 2.48, 3.25	Listen and answer the questions
	2.21, 2.13, 3.14	Listen and choose the correct answer
	2.18	Listen and arrange the pictures in the correct order
Integrated skills (Step 2: Listen)	1.18, 2.09, 2.10, 3.04, 3.17, 3.28	Listen and choose the correct answer
	1.19, 1.33, 1.34, 1.44, 1.46, 2.36, 2.37, 3.05, 3.18, 3.29	Listen and complete the blanks in a dialogue/ Notes/ Table
	1.33, 1.44, 2.09, 2.36, 3.04, 3.17, 3.28	Listen and answer the questions
	1.46, 2.10, 3.05, 3.18, 3.29	Listen and repeat to practice intonation
Writing	1.35, 3.06, 3.19	Read and listen, then answer the questions
	1.47	Complete the blanks, then listen to check answers
	2.11	Read and listen to a text, then match the headings/Pictures
	2.23	Read and listen to a text, then give opinion

***Note:** Table does not include Collaborative Project Units.

The analysis shows that while there are focused activities for listening comprehension under ‘Vocabulary and listening’ and ‘Integrated skills’, there are many other opportunities for learners to listen to authentic spoken English within the other components. However, to properly evaluate the listening activities in a coursebook, Richards (2009) suggests that listening tasks are tested against four criteria: Content validity, comprehension or memory, purposefulness and transferability, and testing or teaching. The teachers’ understanding of the needs of the curriculum, the students and evaluation of each lesson will determine the outcome of these four criteria and affect their decision on whether to carry out an activity as stated in the textbook or to make modifications that better suit their situation.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

A phenomenological qualitative research design using open-ended interviews was applied to gain a detailed understanding of the teachers’ perceptions on using the listening materials in the Pulse 2 textbook. This design was selected for its “strong philosophical underpinnings” (Creswell, 2018, p.61) as the researcher aimed to describe the experiences and perceptions of the participants stemming from their philosophical and personal backgrounds as educators.

3.2. Participants

To analyze teachers’ perceptions on the Pulse 2 textbook in teaching listening skills, the target population for this study were lower-secondary English teachers from a public secondary school in Malaysia. Considering factors such as time, geographical area and the specific criteria of being a Pulse 2 listening skills teacher, a convenient sampling method was used to select the participants. According to (Dörnyei & Taguchi, 2009, pp. 61), convenience sampling is a type of non-probability sampling where members of the target population are selected for the study “if they meet certain practical criteria, such

as geographical proximity, availability at a certain time, or easy accessibility.” Creswell (2017) further adds that this sampling is not necessarily based on convenience, and is in fact often partially purposeful, in that the participants chosen should possess features related to the investigation's purpose. Since one of the researchers is currently serving at a secondary school in Semenyih, Selangor, there was a direct access to interview the lower-secondary English teachers currently teaching Form 1 and Form 2. This accessibility allowed the researcher to recruit five participants for the research with amicable permission, schedule interviews with ease and conduct follow-up sessions for member-checking. Member-checking was important in this study since it was qualitative in nature. As participants were conveniently available, member checking ensured the credibility of results, hence contributing to trustworthiness (Birt, 2006; Creswell, 2017).

3.3. Research Instrument

For this study, the researchers thoroughly studied the insights from the literature to first formulate specific research questions which address the gaps. These research questions then guided the content of the interview guide. The self-constructed interview guide included five carefully structured questions regarding demographic details, level of satisfaction, approaches used in teaching listening and views on issues and challenges. To ensure the trustworthiness of data obtained from the interviews, the self-developed interview guide was reviewed by two subject-matter experts (SMEs) and an inter-rater reliability test was also conducted. A Kappa score of 0.78 was achieved which ensured substantial agreement, consistency between raters and instrument reliability (McHugh, 2012).

3.4. Qualitative Data Analyses

The analysis of data was carried out using Braun and Clarke’s (2006, 2012) six-phase thematic analytic process to simplify qualitative data analysis (Figure 1). In steps 1 and 2, researchers first became familiarized with data collected before generating initial codes. The interview was first transcribed non-verbatim, then coded using the In-Vivo Coding method. According to Saldaña (2013), this method is appropriate for most qualitative studies and is particularly useful for studies that wish to “prioritize and honor the participant’s voice” (p.91). To complete step 3, the researchers identified several themes from the coded interview data. These themes were reviewed through an iterative cycle, between steps 3 to 5, before the final report was produced (step 6).

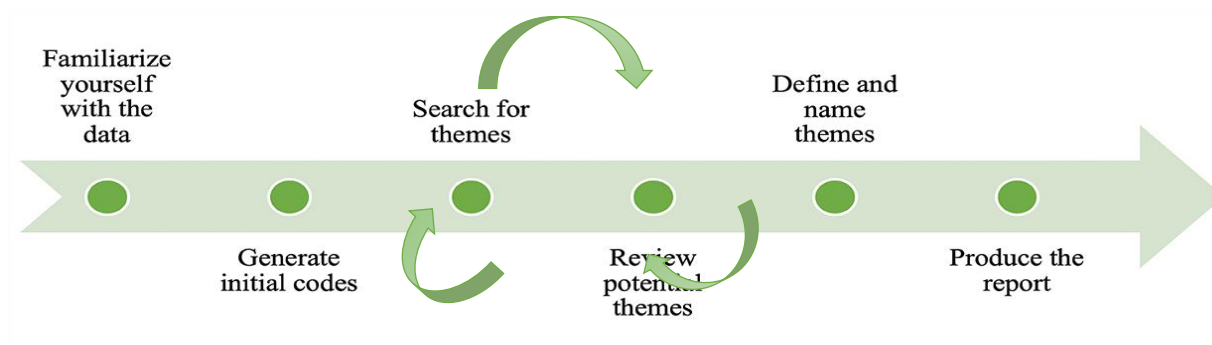


Figure 1.
Six-phase thematic analytic process.
Source: Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2012).

4. Findings

4.1. Demographic Data of Respondents

This section presents the demographic data of the respondents in this study.

Table 2.
Demographic data of respondents.

Description		Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Participants	Male	0	0
	Female	5	100
Qualifications	Master	1	20
	Bachelor	4	80
	PhD/Doctorate	0	0
Age	Below 21	0	0
	22-30	2	40
	31-40	2	40
	41-50	1	20
	51-55	0	0
Teaching experience (Years)	0-2	0	0
	3-5	3	60
	6-10	1	20
	11-15	1	20
	More than 15	0	0

Note: n=5.

Table 2 shows the demographic data of the respondents in this study. All respondents interviewed in this study were females. Of them, 80% (4) participants held a bachelor's degree and 20% (1) held a master's qualification. With regards to age, 80% (4) were between the ages of 22 to 40 years old, while only one respondent was between 41 to 50 years old. In terms of teaching experience, 60% (3) have under 10 years of experience, 20% (2) have between 11 to 15 years of experience and only 20% (1) have teaching experience of more than 15 years. As previously mentioned, all respondents involved in this were currently teaching using the Pulse 2 textbook, either at Form 1 or Form 2 levels. Since this study was on lower secondary school level, as observed, most teachers appointed to teach at this level were early into their career. In Malaysian schools, teachers with higher experiences are usually appointed to teach higher levels, especially students that need to attend the Malaysia national examination, known as Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM).

4.2. Summary of Major Conclusions from Data Analysis

This study which applied the Six-phase Thematic Analytic process (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2012) was designed based on three research questions that specifically explored lower secondary school teachers' perceptions of using the listening materials in the CEFR-aligned Pulse 2 textbook. Based on data obtained from the interviews, a summary of the major findings and themes developed is tabled below Table 3.

Table 3.
Summary of major findings from data analysis.

Codes	Major findings	Themes developed
1	a. positive perceptions towards the introduction of Pulse 2 textbook for lower secondary students b. positive level of satisfaction on using the listening materials in the Pulse 2 textbook	Level of satisfaction
2	c. unanimous on the adequacy of the types of listening materials provided in the Pulse 2 textbook	Adequacy of the types of listening materials

	d. materials were varied and covered diverse real-life situations e. length of material	
3	f. satisfied level observed on the types of activities provided in the textbook g. listening lesson was outlined with pre-listening (set induction), during and post-listening activities.	Adequacy of the types and design of activities for students
4	h. different areas of concern expressed affecting students' engagement with material: - Relevance and relatability of the cultural content of the material - Speed and unfamiliar native accents of the speakers in the audio recordings.	Suitability of materials with students' background
5	i. listening materials were sufficiently effective in achieving curriculum objectives j. weaker students needed much more guidance when carrying out a listening activity using the Pulse 2 Textbook.	Effectiveness of the listening materials in achieving curriculum objectives
6	k. consistency in opinion for implementing instructions as outlined in the textbook.	Implementation of listening activities from the textbook
7	l. Modifications and adaptations were made for differentiation, time constraints, engagement: i. modifications - Self-Designed worksheets that match the Pulse 2 listening audio - Incorporating other sources of audio into their listening lessons. ii. time management - Replaying the audio multiple times - Explaining multiple times iii. engagement with materials - Weaker students needed material modifications and additional support to stay engaged - Pairing of high and low ability students as approach to teaching listening and staying engaged	Approaches in teaching listening through Pulse 2 textbook

8	<p>m. need better facilities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Audio equipment, specifically speakers and building acoustics for effective transmission of sound throughout the classroom space. <p>n. uncertainties about teaching listening comprehension effectively,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Knowledge of the textbook materials and usage, - Familiarity with the curriculum, - IT literacy - Knowledge of teaching and assessing listening skills 	Issues and challenges
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The major findings formulated from the data analysis are divided into eight major themes as summarized above and are discussed in more detail below.

4.3. Theme 1: Level of Satisfaction

In general, respondents reported a positive satisfaction level, although more senior teachers reported stating a much lower satisfaction level compared to the younger ones. Table 4 further indicates that teachers who are early in their career, between 3 to 5 years, show the highest level of satisfaction with the materials in Pulse 2 textbook.

Table 4.
Level of satisfaction with the materials in Pulse 2 textbook.

Description		Teaching experience (Years)	Level of satisfaction with pulse 2 textbook listening materials
Age	Below 21	0	0
	22-30	2	4
	31-40	2	3.5
	41-50	1	3
	51-55	0	-
Teaching experience (Years)	0-2	0	0
	3-5	3	4
	6-10	1	3.5
	11-15	1	3
	More than 15	0	-

Note: n=5; Satisfaction level: 5 = highest; 1=lowest.

*"I believe the materials are relevant to my generation and I can gauge it.
Probably benefits of being a young teacher?"* [Teacher 2, 18/4/2024]

4.4. Theme 2: Adequacy of the Types of Listening Materials

The respondents were found to be unanimous in the matter of the adequacy of the types of listening materials provided in the Pulse 2 Textbook. Although all 5 respondents (100%) agreed on the adequacy, 3 (60%) specifically mentioned that the listening materials covered diverse real-life situations.

"Yes, I think it's enough for the pupils to learn through those variety of listening material in the textbook." [Teacher 4, 18/4/2024]

"They cover a wide range of contexts, including public announcements, media sources, live audience interactions, and overheard conversations. This diversity ensures that learners are exposed to various real-life situations, which is essential for developing listening skills."

[Teacher 3, 18/4/2024]

"I think there's quite a variety of texts...So the students are exposed to different situations of English being used in real life."

[Teacher 1, 18/4/2024]

Only one respondent, the most experienced teacher, supplied a slightly adverse comment on the length of the materials.

"...agreed on adequacy...but some of the materials are too short."

[Teacher 5, 18/4/2024]

4.5. Theme 3: Adequacy of Design and Activities for Students

All respondents stated that the types and the design of activities for their students were adequate. Most respondents (80 %) strongly stated that each listening lesson has its own pre-, while and post-listening activities, which are also often varied in types.

One respondent particularly mentioned that the material's design was highly adequate because these activities prepared students for the standardized national level listening test.

"Yes, I think they are adequate as the textbook contains formats and strategies that is needed for the students to pass the listening test in SPM."

[Teacher 4, 18/4/2024]

4.6. Theme 4: Suitability of Materials with Students' Background

In terms of suitability of materials, the teachers touched on different perspectives which they felt were the most relevant to them and the students they teach. Three respondents mentioned some of the cultural content of the textbook was unrelatable, uninteresting or not engaging to their students.

"Some, not all [are suitable]. The different background of country sometimes makes the pupils lose focus and not interested."

[Teacher 1, 18/4/2024]

"I doubt it is suitable for the Malaysian students as it is based on life in the UK. So, the students here cannot relate with their lives."

[Teacher 4, 18/4/2024]

"But the content is a bit difficult to explain to them sometimes. Like that map where all the place names were of British stops."

[Teacher 5, 18/4/2024]

Three respondents, including Teachers 4 and 5 mention that while the text is authentic, the speed of the speakers' speech seems to have been sufficiently adjusted to cater to the level of the majority of Malaysian students at this stage.

"However, for the speed, I think it's quite suitable for the students as it is not too fast, so they can catch up if they listen and focus."

[Teacher 1, 18/4/2024]

"The accents are quite thickly European, but the speed appears to have been slowed down a bit so the low proficiency kids can follow."

[Teacher 5, 18/4/2024]

"...and include a variety of accents and speech speeds, catering to their needs effectively."

[Teacher 3, 18/4/2024]

However, unlike Teachers 1,3 and 5 who viewed the variety of accents used as a positive aspect of the audio provided, Teacher 4 expressed concern for low proficiency students who were not used to listening to the native speakers' accent.

"It is also the same with the accents used especially for the low proficiency students who are not used to listening to the native speakers' accent, which may cause them to fail the listening test."

[Teacher 4, 18/4/2024]

4.7. Theme 5: Effectiveness of the Listening Materials in Achieving Curriculum Objectives

In terms of the effectiveness of the listening materials in achieving curriculum objectives, T5, the most experienced teacher stated that this may be true for intermediate to advanced students, but less effective for low proficiency students.

“Yes, for advanced pupils. Not for the weak.”

[Teacher 5, 18/4/2024]

“And I think for high to intermediate students, the activities are useful in developing their listening skills and oral skills. But for the weaker students, I do a lot of scaffolding to achieve the objectives.”

[Teacher 5, 18/4/2024]

However, the other four respondents felt that the materials provided adequate aid to improve the students' listening skills and sufficiently fulfil the lesson objectives.

4.8. Theme 6: Implementation of Listening Activities from the Textbook

In this section, the respondents expressed their view on their tendency to carry through listening activities exactly as it is described and outlined in the Pulse 2 textbook. Two out of the 5 respondents stated that their decision to follow the instructions provided in the textbook for listening activities would be based on the students' proficiency.

“I look at the types of materials used and my pupils' ability. For my high-ability pupils, I follow 100% of the steps given.”

[Teacher 2, 18/4/2024]

“It depends on the students I'm teaching. For high proficiency students, I often follow the steps as they are. For intermediate students, I follow the steps but maybe slow the pace a bit. For weaker students I'd probably just use the audio but create my own worksheet.”

[Teacher 5, 18/4/2024]

Another two respondents stated that they implemented the activities based on the SOW regularly, while Teacher 1, who has the least number of years in service, admits to 'not often' in following the activities in the textbook.

4.9. Theme 7: Approaches in Teaching Listening Through Pulse 2 Textbook

All respondents cited performing modifications or adaptations of the listening activities from the textbook primarily due to students' level of proficiency. Apart from students' ability to comprehend the listening materials as the reason for modification, 3 of the 5 respondents also cited time constraints as being one factor for modifications.

“I usually make modifications and adaptations based on my pupils' level of ability and time constraints.”

[Teacher 1, 18/4/2024]

“Due to time constraints, I also choose certain audio lessons to play. Sometimes I look for other sources of audio and listening tasks activities for remedial and enhancement activities.”

[Teacher 3, 18/4/2024]

“Types of modifications I make may include: ... 2. Adjusting tasks to fit within time constraints while still achieving learning objectives.”

[Teacher 4, 18/4/2024]

The respondents also mentioned ways in which they would modify or adapt their lessons for differentiation, including replaying the audio multiple times (Teacher 2, Teacher 4), doing group or pair work (Teacher 2, Teacher 5), creating curated worksheets (Teacher 4, Teacher 5) and incorporating other sources of audio (Teacher 3, Teacher 4).

“Implementation of instructions for different groups of students takes time and sometimes not all students can be accommodated at once”

[Teacher 4, 18/4/2024]

With regards to student engagement whilst carrying out listening lessons from the Pulse 2 Textbook, most respondents (80%) mentioned that weaker learners required materials modification to

stay engaged, while students with higher learning abilities were better engaged with the current available materials.

Further probing also discovered that to attract and engage students facing difficulty in engaging with the materials, teachers created activities that required group or pair work, pairing students of higher-level abilities to coach the weaker ones.

"Additionally, offering opportunities for pair or group work allows weaker students to benefit from peer support and collaboration..."

[Teacher 4, 18/4/2024]

"However, for intermediate and low level.... I put them in pairs or groups to complete the activities rather than working independently."

[Teacher 2, 18/4/2024]

"...When they see the high ability students focusing, all of them will automatically pay attention too."

[Teacher 3, 18/4/2024]

4.10. Theme 8: Issues and Challenges

On the matter of issues and challenges, various aspects developed. All respondents had similar consensus that one of the challenges is the extra guidance, encouragement and support. Although this was crucial in ensuring weaker students are on track, there was a lot of effort and time consumption on the part of teachers. This includes pre-teaching key vocabulary (Teacher 4, Teacher 5), simplifying instructions (Teacher 4) and having pre-listening discussions (Teacher 5).

When asked about external issues which are beyond the teachers' control, all five teachers cited the need for better audio equipment. Two respondents mentioned that class size and the surroundings played a part in this (Teacher 1, Teacher 3 and Teacher 5). Teacher 5 explained that the location of the regular classrooms being close to each other or near the field affected the class acoustics, hindering the clarity of the audio.

Teacher 4 and Teacher 5 further elaborated that listening lessons required planning and preparation, and that the improvisation of listening lessons for instances when they lacked proper tools and resources was time-consuming and challenging. To ensure the lessons went smoothly, they would seek other locations to carry out listening sessions such as the multimedia room, APD room or the Language Lab and are most times occupied for other lessons.

"It takes a lot of planning and preparing for a listening lesson. I often find a better room like the APD or Language Lab because these places are far from other classrooms."

[Teacher 4, 18/4/2024]

"Moreover, the level of support from the school administration and availability of resources like audio playback devices or multimedia rooms also impact the teaching process. Lack of support or resources may require improvisation or adaptation of lesson plans, which can be time-consuming and challenging."

[Teacher 5, 18/4/2024]

The most experienced teacher in the group, Teacher 5, repeated the difficulty of not having the proper tools to teach listening, suggesting she had full confidence in teaching listening, and it was only external factors that prevented her from effectively carrying out these lessons.

On matters of professional development, Teacher 1, Teacher 3, and Teacher 4 indicated they still had room for learning and improvement when it comes to their capabilities for teaching listening.

"I may sometimes doubt my proficiency in teaching listening comprehension effectively using the Pulse 2 textbook."

[Teacher 4, 18/4/2024]

"I think my knowledge of the content in the textbook limits me to teaching the students more skillfully as I am still new in this field. I will need more time to master the art of teaching listening to my students."

[Teacher 2, 18/4/2024]

"I think I'm capable of conducting a listening lesson, but I'm not sure if the students are actually achieving listening skills... I tell them strategies on how to listen for ideas too. But for weak students, it's difficult to get past the vocabulary level. I think I still have a lot to learn."

[Teacher 1, 18/4/2024]

Other internal issues cited by the teachers were their time management skills (Teacher 2), their IT literacy and sometimes unfamiliarity with the knowledge of the content and curriculum (Teacher 4).

5. Discussion

The present study unveiled an overall positive perception of the listening materials in the Pulse 2 textbook. Based on the summary of major findings, the listening materials in the Pulse 2 textbook were found to be adequate and sufficient as it contained an age-appropriate developed content, variety in text types and activities that covered diverse real-life situations. The teachers were also generally satisfied with the approach to conducting the listening activities as each listening lesson was outlined with pre-, during and post-listening materials. Goh & Aziz (2020) in their research on Pulse 2 textbook for teaching speaking, found similar results. The study's overall findings indicated that the speaking activities were mainly rated practical to be used to teach speaking skill and easy to be utilized for speaking assessment purposes.

However, the teachers still expressed some concerns about the relevance and relatability of the textbook's cultural content. This is consistent with much of the existing research on the Pulse 2 textbook, including Johari & Aziz (2019) whose respondents cited that the foreign cultural content limited the students' engagement towards the lesson, which led to teachers having to provide a lot of guidance and supplementary materials to help students understand the cultural context in the textbook. In addition, Shak et al. (2021b) in a study on introducing foreign cultural content from pulse 2 to students similarly concurred that teachers preferred imported English textbooks with local modifications, as this balance would fulfill the language needs of the students while also ensuring students are engaged with content that is more relatable to them. Alternatively, findings from this study also coincides with Arumugam et al.'s (2021) study on teachers' perceptions of the Pulse 2's cultural content in which teachers, although positively perceived the textbook, disclosed a mixed perception of its foreign cultural content stating an imbalance portrayal of cultural categories with no reference made to the Malaysian context.

Although on the whole teachers found the materials in Pulse 2 textbook acceptable apart from its cultural context in teaching listening to lower secondary students, there was however also a mixed perception in its lexical suitability for weaker students which influenced students' language competency. Past research on Pulse 2 textbook also generated parallel findings. Johari and Aziz (2019) in their study on teachers' perception on using the Pulse 2 textbook received similar opinions, conceding that while the textbook contains good language models and beneficial language input, some lexical aspects of Pulse 2 were both positively and negatively viewed. Weaker students faced greater lack of language comprehension as compared to intermediate and advanced level students. This led to Shak et al. (2021b) suggesting that a revision of the textbook should be undertaken to suit Malaysian students' mixed proficiency levels. Shak's (2021b) findings align with the results of this study which found that in its current form, the listening materials in the Pulse 2 Textbook best suit intermediate to advanced learners but more modification and adaptations are needed for weaker students.

Interestingly however, this study found that most teachers often considered carrying out the listening lessons as outlined in the textbook, which suggests that the teachers found the tasks suitable for their classrooms. Modifications and adaptations were made primarily when there was a need for differentiation or when the teachers faced time constraints. The ease of which teachers can control the implementation of the tasks in the Pulse 2 Textbook is supported by Ismail & Aziz (2019) who found that most teachers adapted the Pulse 2 textbook activities to fit their students' needs, including by creating personalized activities based on pictures in the textbook and adding supplementary materials for weak learners.

On issues and challenges teachers faced when teaching listening using the Pulse 2 textbook, all teachers cited the need for better audio equipment, specifically speakers. Teachers also reported citing for better building acoustics to ensure effective transmission of sound throughout the classroom space. This appears to be an ongoing struggle throughout many language classrooms in Malaysia and around the world (Ahmad & Abidin, 2017; Alrawashdeh & Al-zayed, 2017; Datta & Roy, 2023; Thao & Tham, 2020; Zhang, 2020). As prompted from this study, teachers believe

that providing proper audio-visual equipment in schools and conducive learning environments at this digital age should be a priority for the ministry to ensure the CEFR-aligned curriculum is conducted appropriately, giving balance to all four language skills.

In addition to proper hardware and the learning environment, matters of professional development in teaching listening were also highlighted. Teachers expressed uncertainties about teaching listening comprehension using the Pulse 2 Textbook effectively, citing lack of knowledge in terms of the textbook, the curriculum and the required skills for teaching and assessing listening skills associated with CEFR aligned textbook. This is consistent with the study by Ahmad & Abidin (2017) who found that apart from the lack of equipment in teaching listening in school, teacher competency was also another challenge. This is not surprising as the teachers in service now are the products of the exam-oriented syllabus before KSSM where much emphasis was put on achieving better grades in reading and writing. Shifting from exam-oriented curriculum to include teaching receptive skills like speaking and listening and readjusting from long-held practices of rote-learning will take a lot of time and support from various stakeholders.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, the findings of this study signify that while teachers have had positive experience using the listening materials from the Pulse 2 Textbook and have successfully adapted these resources to fit their classroom needs, substantial challenges continue to arise. Findings strongly confirm that in teaching listening using Pulse 2 textbook it is essential to address infrastructural shortcomings, invest in quality equipment, and enhance professional development for teachers to fully realize the potential of this CEFR-aligned textbook and improve English proficiency among lower-secondary Malaysian students. Policy implications suggest that stakeholders should prioritize these areas to support effective implementation of the curriculum and ensure balanced skill development. Since this research was limited to only one specific school, future research should include various schools both from urban and rural areas. In addition, research can also focus on exploring the specific barriers to infrastructure and equipment, evaluating the impact of targeted professional development programs, and investigating the long-term outcomes of using CEFR-aligned materials in diverse educational settings.

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