

MALAYSIAN TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS
ON USING THE LISTENING MATERIALS
FROM GET SMART PLUS 4 ENGLISH TEXTBOOK

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DEDICATION

I humbly dedicate the completion of this paper to my ageless and kind supervisor, Dr. Shanti Chandaran A/P Sandaran, my dearest parents, Mr. Mohan A/L M.S. Damodaran and Mrs. Sathiabama A/P K.Neelakandan, my lovely sisters, Harchana Nair A/P Mohan and Haiswariyah Nair A/P Mohan, my motivating friends, Mohd Ashraf Bin Awang, Waleed Gadri, Sami Mohammed A Alsadi, Abigail Gunasagaran, Nur Anisa Binti Ibrahim Gani and Clara Vellangani A/P Peter for their continuous guidance, advice and support.

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ABSTRACT

The present study evaluated the listening materials of Get Smart Plus 4, an official textbook used for Primary 4 pupils in all primary schools nationwide in Malaysia. In previous studies, textbook evaluation was quite popular with researchers in an overall or general way where all the basic language skills were included. Some researchers often assessed the reading and writing parts of coursebooks. Unfortunately, there was a lack of studies on the evaluation of listening skills due to not being exam-orientated. In addition, previous studies were likely to use only interviews as a research instrument to know the teachers' opinions using the textbooks. However, in this research, a case study research design was conducted utilising the descriptive qualitative method, which includes interviews and document analysis. Data were collected from 7 English primary school teachers around the Kulai district currently teaching Primary 4 or had previously taught using the Get Smart Plus 4 English textbook. Document analysis was also carried out on the Get Smart Plus 4 English textbook using a textbook evaluation checklist. The evaluation was important to find out the perception of the teachers on using the listening materials of the Get Smart Plus 4 English textbook as well as the effectiveness of the Get Smart Plus 4 English Textbook in enhancing the students' listening skills. Based on the textbook evaluation results, most experts agree that the Get Smart Plus 4 English textbook is suitable for the Primary four teachers in teaching the listening activities in class. Furthermore, the researcher found an adequate amount of listening materials and activities to assist the pupils in acquiring the listening skill. However, the textbooks need to be improved by making a specific listening module to help teachers concentrate on the listening skill and add more authentic listening materials connected with the Malaysian context.

KEYWORDS: Teacher's perception, listening skill, English textbook

ABSTRAK

Kajian ini bertujuan menilai bahan mendengar Get Smart Plus 4, buku teks rasmi yang digunakan untuk murid sekolah rendah Darjah 4 di semua sekolah rendah di seluruh negara. Dalam kajian sebelumnya, penilaian buku teks cukup terkenal dengan penyelidik yang mencari cara keseluruhan atau umum di mana semua kemahiran asas bahasa disertakan dan sebilangan penyelidik sering menilai bahagian membaca dan menulis buku-buku. Malangnya, terdapat kekurangan kajian mengenai penilaian kemahiran mendengar yang tidak dikaji. Di samping itu, kajian terdahulu lebih cenderung menggunakan wawancara hanya sebagai instrumen kajian untuk guru yang menggunakan buku teks. Namun, dalam hal ini, pengkaji melakukan reka bentuk kajian kajian kes menggunakan kaedah deskriptif kualitatif yang merangkumi temu bual dan analisis dokumen. Pengkaji menemui data daripada 7 orang guru sekolah rendah Inggeris di sekitar daerah Kulai yang kini mengajar sekolah rendah atau menggunakan buku teks Get Smart Plus 4 English. Pengkaji juga melakukan analisis dokumen pada buku teks Get Smart Plus 4 English menggunakan senarai semak penilaian buku teks. Buku Teks Bahasa Inggeris Smart Smart 4 adalah kaedah terbaik untuk meningkatkan kemahiran mendengar anda dengan menggunakan kemahiran mengajar terbaik yang ada pada guru. Berdasarkan hasil penilaian buku teks, kebanyakan pakar bersetuju bahawa buku teks Get Smart Plus 4 English adalah 4 guru utama yang mengajar di kelas. Selanjutnya, penyelidik menemui sejumlah bahan dan aktiviti mendengar yang mencukupi untuk membantu pemerolehan kemahiran mendengar. Walau bagaimanapun, buku teks perlu diperbaiki dengan membuat modul pendengaran khusus untuk membantu guru menumpukan perhatian pada kemahiran mendengar dan bahan pendengaran yang lebih autentik yang lebih berkaitan dengan konteks Malaysia.

KATA-KATA KUNCI: Pendapat guru, kemahiran mendengar, buku teks bahasa Inggeris

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

KSSR	-	Kurikulum Standard Sekolah Rendah
UPSR	-	Ujian Penilaian Sekolah Rendah
CEFR	-	Common European Framework of Reference for Languages
CECR	-	Chinese College English Curriculum Requirements
CD	-	Compact Disc
LINUS	-	The Literacy and Numeracy Screening
SPM	-	Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia
HOTS	-	Higher Order Thinking Skills
CLIL	-	Content and Language Integrated Learning
ICT	-	Information and Communications Technology
ZPD	-	Zone of Proximal Development
SOW	-	Scheme Of Work
BPK	-	Bahagian Pembangunan Kurikulum
UTM	-	Universiti Teknologi Malaysia

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

The effects of using listening materials have received a tremendous amount of attention over the years. Kaufmann (2019) reveals that the contents of books must be relevant to the students' daily lives, which can be crucial to lengthening their attention span. Evidence is provided in the study of Czech's historical contexts; there is an eagerness to gain information connecting with its pasts. Mohammadi and Abdi (2014) view the textbook as a guide for educators and learners to drill on the topic or subject using its contents. Even though the use of textbooks is important in developing a person's language, the listening skill is not stressed much compared to the reading, writing and speaking skills. Samad, Hussin and Sulaiman (2015) as cited in Shian and Yunus (2016), argue that many regulated public examinations focus mainly on reading and writing. The neglecting of listening and speaking skills as they are less significant in Malaysian examinations and classroom settings might affect the students' future careers to cope with the competition with others in the actual world (Hassan & Selamat, 2017).

Despite the importance of using the listening tasks, He and Chen (2017) confess that China neglected the significance of listening and speaking skills due to the Chinese educating and studying English language cultures. However, things start to change when people require it in their work conditions and daily lives. In a recent investigation, Oktaviani (2018) studies the cognitive field types of the "English Year Five" textbook based on Bloom's taxonomy. In contrast, in the current study, the researcher concentrates on the listening materials and tasks of the "Get Smart Plus 4" English textbook used by Primary Four teachers implemented in the year 2020. Even though there are observations on the Primary Five book proving the students to be more communicative to their peers in class and adapting well to the curriculum of

Kurikulum Standard Sekolah Rendah (KSSR), there is no more in-depth investigation related to the listening skill. Asemota (2015) stresses that a fine hearer will view various speakers' articulation, facial emotions, and body gestures, including parts of phrases. Thinking of the importance of mastering the listening skill, academic professionals should utilise different ways to support the learners in obtaining proper syntax and lexical contents of the language. Therefore, there must be more studies on the appraisal of listening materials and activities to be carried out. Moreno (2015) asserts that language coaches must acknowledge the significance of understanding the impact of listening tasks as building blocks for obtaining good language proficiency. The coaches should have the expertise of listening comprehension stagings, determinants influencing the listening judgments and efficient methods to evaluate the students' listening skills.

In this study, the focus is on the teachers' perceptions about the listening materials of the recently implemented, Year 4 English textbook. The study follows the suggestions of Johar and Aziz (2019) who stress the importance of evaluating the contents and obtaining the educators' opinions on the Pulse 2 English textbook. The teachers' thoughts on the strengths and drawbacks may prove valuable for other language coaches to adapt and improvise on the book's materials, which will lead to a practical lesson. The current study contains various definitions, pros, cons and views of scholars on evaluating the textbooks and the listening skill. In addition, the research method comprises the research design, sample population, data instruments and data collection used to answer the research questions of the study.

1.2 Problem Background

English language lessons usually need authentic materials to aid the teachers to develop the skills of their learners. Viales and Carmona (2016) utter English language coaches often teach lessons using the coursebooks. Notwithstanding, the book might not display the actual occurrence related to the pupils' necessities and concerns. Accordingly, educators must have the ability to carry out textbook

evaluations to pick tasks that can cater to the students' interest, lesson aims and pedagogical context. Teachers should keep in mind the cultural differences, semantic levels and chances for oral practice when designing, modifying or copying the materials. Textbooks provide a pivotal supply of teaching guidance and increase language learners' chances to test their cognitive skills. Alshumaimeri and Alzyadi (2015) declare by exhibiting materials related to real-life will give pupils to practice the language beyond class settings. Consequently, it is an essential task to measure the textbooks' materials, whether they contain features not only to prepare them for Ujian Penilaian Sekolah Rendah (UPSR) but also to assess their ability of reasoning (Tan, Ismail & Abidin, 2018).

The use of short audio helps educators calm the students down for their excitement to listen to the clip (McCaughey, 2015) fully. The researcher also adds that teachers should allow students to catch the points by playing the clip several times. Teachers feel that using audio materials in the class effectively gets the students' concentration and readily accessible for teachers, but sometimes a bit tough for the lower proficiency students (Shian & Yunus, 2016). On the other hand, the researchers assert that the students feel the lessons are much more appealing, provide a longer attention span in the topic but find the audio playback a bit fast for them to catch up. Aljouei and Alsuhaibani (2018) state that exercises in the textbook apply the listening skill using students' previous knowledge and images. The contextualisation process of recalling students' schemata is useful to prepare them for the listening task.

1.3 Problem Statement

Many educators have mixed perceptions of the usage of textbooks in classroom settings. Coursebooks can either encourage or demotivate a student who is sole to its effectiveness and applicableness of the materials (Zohrabi Sabouri & Kheradmand 2014). Johar and Aziz (2019) express their concern about using the international Pulse 2 book in the Malaysian school settings. The scholars also blame the textbook is incompatible to the students' requirements and the word list may be difficult for

students from provincial areas. Khoo and Knight (2015) describe that textbooks used all over the world tend to be inappropriate, inapplicable to the local culture, clashing with the educators teaching methods and neglect to meet the various demands of the students. In a study, Aljouei and Alsuhaibani (2018) point out the audio clips in the “Traveller” English textbook do not sound authentic. The study's findings show the sound clips defer from the way people normally communicate with each other as it was very slow and too formal.

Edrenius (2018) mentions that the teachers feel that listening does not come naturally, so teachers have to train students to learn to listen. Rose and Dalton (2016) say listening to be tricky with various parts of the mind connecting to result in comprehensible input. Therefore, in order to become a skilful listener, one has to partake in different types of learning. Firstly, listeners need to identify the sounds of the foreign language by knowing about syntax and morphology, which is a continuous process of attaining a language. Secondly, they will need to listen actively instead of hearing passively by recognising and understanding sound variations from audio clips containing beats, songs and dialogues. Thirdly, the listeners need to know how to select the essential details such as signs and representations of the speech and ignore the discourse's unnecessary parts. In accordance with Celik et al. (2014), students may confront numerous challenges during listening comprehension, so it is imperative to know the predicaments and resolve them. The issues of using the listening skill in class are the quality of recorded materials that might not be clear, working with entirely dissimilar cultural materials not related to the students and using materials that contain unusual dialects of indigenous and non-native people. In previous papers, many of them concentrate on the textbook's general evaluation, which usually does not stress on the listening skill. However, in this current paper, it concentrates on doing a qualitative study by gaining insights of teachers who are using the textbook about the effectiveness and the usability of the Get Smart 4 English textbook in sharpening the pupils' listening skill.

1.4 Research Objectives

This study attempts to find answers to the following research objectives:

- 1) To investigate the perceptions of teachers on the listening materials of the Get Smart Plus 4 English Textbook
- 2) To study the effectiveness of the Get Smart Plus 4 English Textbook in enhancing the students' listening skills

1.5 Research Questions

This study attempts to find answers to the following research questions:

- 1) What are the perceptions of teachers about the listening materials of the Get Smart Plus 4 English Textbook?
- 2) How does the Get Smart Plus 4 English Textbook enhance students' listening skills?

1.6 Theoretical Framework

Krashen (1982) as cited in Khoiriyah (2020), describes listening as an essential skill for initial language acquisition related to the 'comprehensible input' theory of Second Language Acquisition. Krashen emphasises that knowing the input is the primary target of the attainment of language. Learning occurs when pupils understand the information received via content from a particular source, as in Figure 1.1. Therefore, in a class setting, educators have to provide pupils with valuable language input for the build-up of proper listening skills, leading to a good grasp of the particular language. As a matter of fact, Krashen even thinks that the receptive skills that consist of the listening and reading skills are far more influential than the productive skills that include speaking and writing skills for the building blocks of a language. Gilakjani and Sabouri (2016) remark that learners must be provided with lots of comprehensible

input by giving them chances to view or hear the functions of a language and give them openings to apply the language, especially in a meaningful context.

Subsequently, in Krashen's affective filter hypothesis, pays attention to the pupils' emotions or reactions to a particular input. The hypothesis tries to show that despite getting valuable input concerning the I+1 hypothesis, the students may not successfully achieve the lesson's goals due to unstable mental states or negative feelings such as high anxiety, stressful situations, low energy level and feeling disinterested on the topic. Thus, teachers must adapt the contents or activities within the textbook to increase the pupils' attention span, boost the eagerness to get involved in the activities and reduce the effects of other affective filters in hindering a lesson's success.

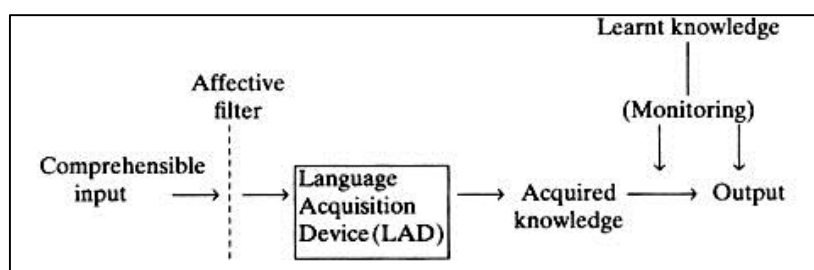


Figure 1.1 Input Hypothesis model

Additionally, coursebooks present students to applying the language to the "real world", which is beyond the school settings. Consequently, the students are introduced with authentic content and materials that enable the learners to obtain more information to add to their previous knowledge. This situation aligns with Vygotsky's (1978) as cited in Edrenius (2018) notion of the zone of proximal development (ZPD) in Figure 1.2, where students get extra knowledge by committing to significant and communicative settings and tasks. In a nutshell, realising understandable coursebooks that incorporate supplementary points exceeding the pupils' level in listening materials may help the learners better acquire the language.

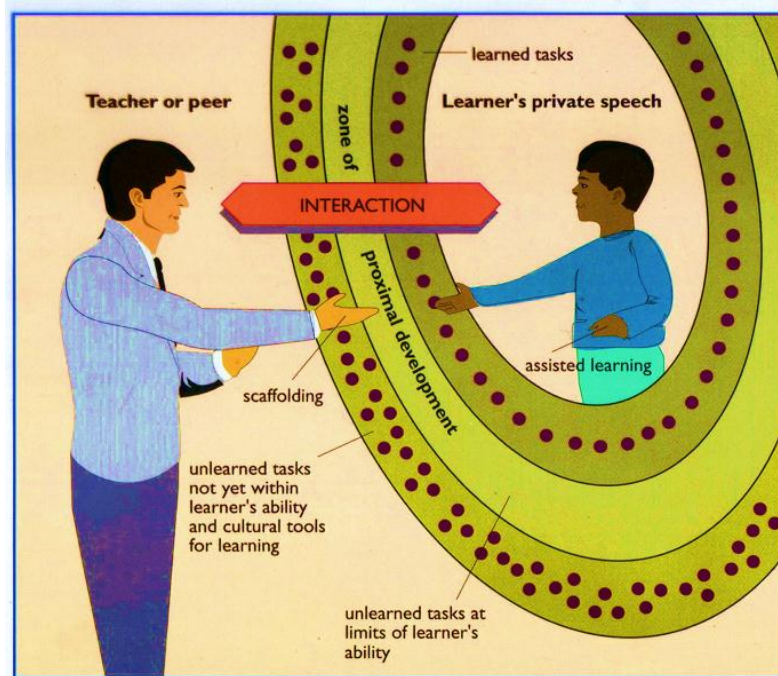


Figure 1.2: Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)

Flowerdew and Miller (2005) present a brief and beneficial interpretation of the diverse language-learning strategies operated for the past century. One of the pioneer strategies is the grammar-translation approach that comprises syntax and linguistic awareness. Students learn the laws of grammar along with a variety of word pools from the second language where it is fused with writing practice. The concentration on listening is not viewed as essential as language during the earlier years stress on the drilling on the laws of the language (p. 4). Later, the direct method highlights the students to speak out to enforce the word structures, but the listening skill is still not given much focus. As a matter of time, grammar-approach manages to give some emphasis on listening skill. Still, mainly teachers use it only in classroom settings and not focusing on global situations (p. 7). Subsequently, the audio-lingual approach enables the students to pay attention to representations of ideal voice clips which contain accurate syntax structures before giving the learners the chance to emulate the sentences.

Besides that, Furuya (2019) says top-down and bottom-up theories are important when carrying out reading or listening activities. Figure 1.3 shows the bottom-up and top-down processes between the auditory periphery and the cognitive

system to interpret the speech sounds (Edwards, 2007). Top-down processes are methods where listeners use the whole (such as their past experiences and updated knowledge) to the parts whereas the bottom-up processes point to methods where listeners shift from the parts to the whole. Khuziakhmetov and Porchesku (2016) mention that teachers use bottom-up methods at the start and end of listening activities. The foundation of those activities will lead to an excellent top-down listening acquisition process. Despite the inadequacy of bottom-up processing in terms of communication, there will be an improvement in language comprehension for basic learners. Martynova (2012); Yachina (2015); Grigoryeva et al. (2015); Yusupova, Podgorecki & Markova (2015); Asaphova & Golovanova (2015); Chiknaverova (2015) as cited in Masalimova, Porchesku and Liakhnovitch (2016) express listening comprehension as a self-sufficient understanding to have an individual's power over recognised words that connect to the purposes and needs of the person's action. For example, by watching a movie or listening to a radio channel, one can get information and hear about what they like. Semantic learning via understanding speech and knowing the rules of speech comprehension provide a reasonable basis for improving programs for teaching second language listening skills (Masalimova, Porchesku & Liakhnovitch 2016).

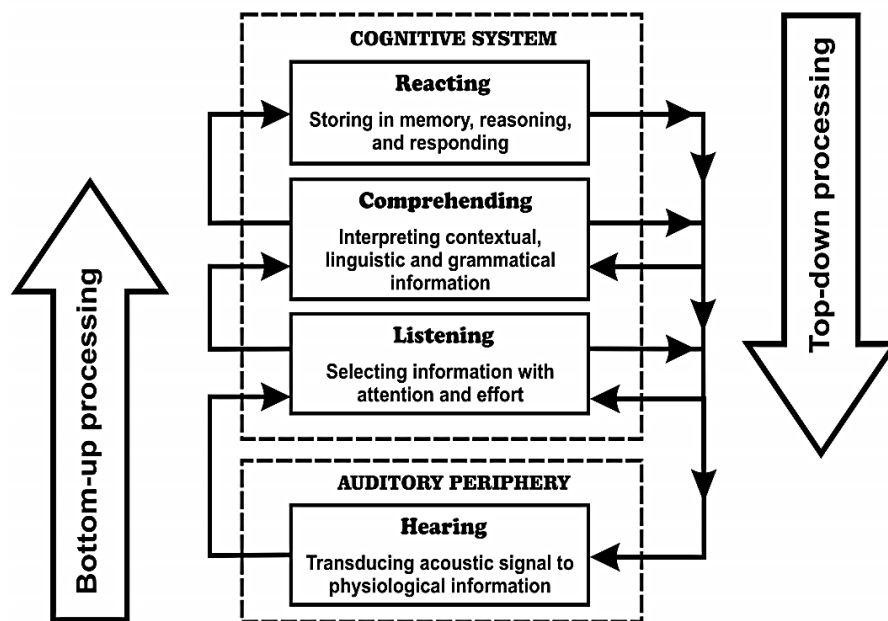


Figure 1.3 Bottom-up and Top-down processes

1.7 Conceptual Framework

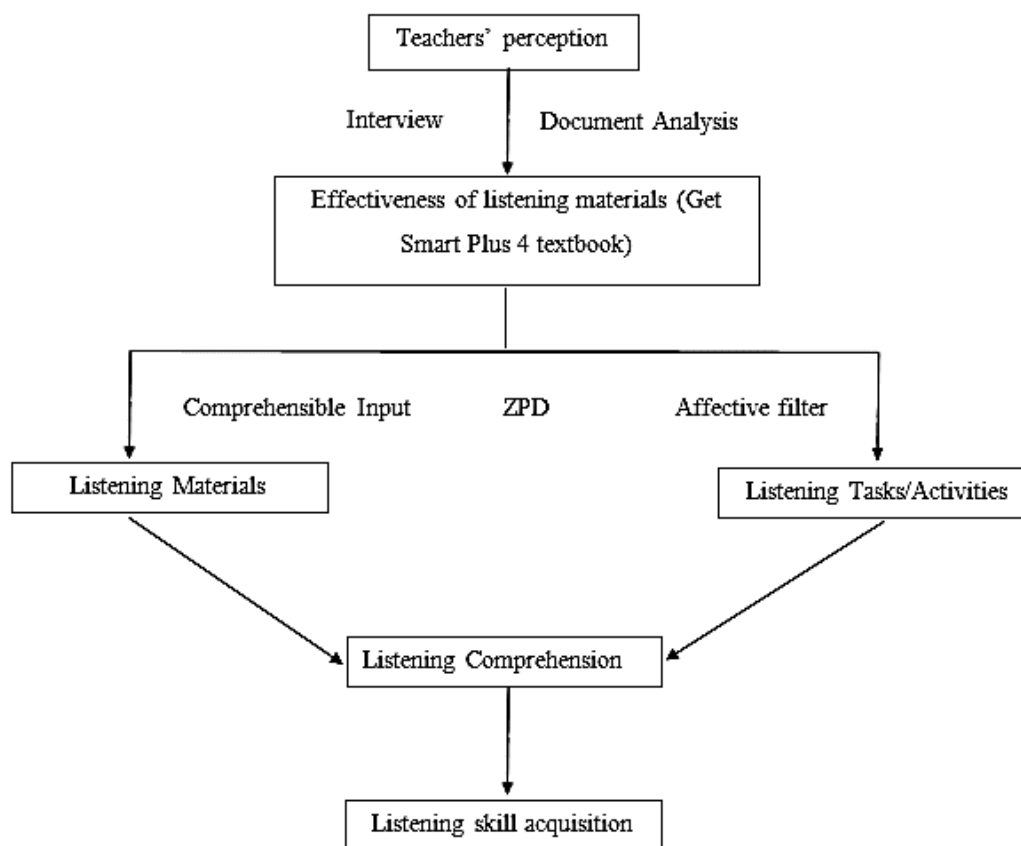


Figure 1.4 The Conceptual Framework

1.8 Significance of study

The research only focuses on the listening tasks and materials from the textbook by carrying out a document analysis and interview sessions with seven teachers from the district of Kulai. Lodhi et al. (2019) agree coursebooks need revision promptly to match with the specific aims of the lessons, especially if the book does not contain revolutionising contents, inappropriate to the learners' schemata and background. The judgement of educators on textbooks is substantial to find out whether the books are assets or liabilities. The teachers need to check if the reading materials fit the criteria and contain sufficient supervision for an effective lesson

(BinObaid, 2016). Mukundan and Kalajahi (2013) find distinct opinions on the helpfulness of the English coursebooks used in Malaysia's primary and secondary schools. Apart from learning the merits and deficiencies of the printed material, the government can bring changes to the materials that contain flaws to suit the students. Educational coaches, who are also the executors of materials within the textbook, have an indispensable part in altering and forming the materials. By giving them opportunities to evaluate the textbooks, it heightens the educational quality and gives them a sense of self-content about their lessons in class (Aljouei & Alsuhaibani, 2018).

1.9 Scope of the Study

It is clear that only one of the language's major skills, which is the listening skill, is being investigated. In contrast, most textbook evaluations check on the overall textbook's general appearance, all skills, content and materials. In this research, the textbook evaluation concentrates on the listening materials of the new Primary Four textbook entitled, "Get Smart Plus 4", which was implemented in 2020. As the researcher is the only person who is doing the document analysis, the content analysis only contains only one individual's evaluation and remarks. For the semi-structured interview sessions, the study targets the seven respondents around Kulai district as getting respondents from all over Malaysia will be difficult due to travelling distance. The last scope is that phone calls are used to conduct the interview sessions instead of meeting the respondents due to the Coronavirus pandemic to avoid any health risks from the global issue which is spreading drastically in recent times.

1.10 Definition of Terms

The following terms are the definitions of terms related to this paper:

1.10.1 Textbooks

The textbook is an indispensable reference source for the learning and teaching process within the education system of countries around the world. Inexperienced teachers from evolving nations see the book as a significant source to depend on content and materials related to their teaching (Mahmood, 2010; Tomlinson, 2011; Nguyen, 2015).

1.10.2 Textbook Evaluation

Nguyen (2015) defines textbook evaluation as the manner of gathering data about a coursebook and interpreting the findings to discover the worthiness, contribute ideas for improvement and instructions of omitting the inadequacy of the materials.

1.10.3 Listening Skill

Mizbani and Chalak (2017) state that listening is a process of acquiring phonetics through words and phrases. Individuals obtain specific sounds comprising alphabets, pressure, tone and lapses, which the brain generates them into vital information. Various communication systems view focus and attentiveness as crucial listening components as personalities that fail to stay focused are the weaker listeners.

1.10.4 Listening Materials

Listening materials are background collections of sound clips that include chosen information and is presented sequentially (Wilson, 2000).

1.11 Conclusion

BinObaid (2016) stresses the implications of the language coursebooks having inaccuracies to the pupils as they might fossilise the textbook's wrong terms and apply it in their real lives. Hence, teachers, curriculum developers and textbook publishers need to pay equal attention to the positives and negatives of the textbook via the assessment of the book based on the students' needs, the learners' cultural differences, various types of materials to test all four skills, varied levels of activities to cater to the different proficiency levels of students and to achieve the goals of the lessons within the syllabus successfully. There is a hope that this study can shed light on teachers' perceptions from the evaluation of listening materials and tasks of the latest primary 4 textbooks. In the following chapter, the literature review is discussed thoroughly to give better insight into past research papers related to the study topic.

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